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The book cover features a stylized illustration in shades of orange, red, and black. It depicts a tropical scene with a large, low sun on the horizon, its light reflecting on the water. In the foreground, two figures are silhouetted against the bright background: a man stands with his back to the viewer, looking out at the sea, while a smaller figure, possibly a child, stands to his left. A palm tree is visible on the right side of the frame. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

Honk and Horace

on improving the Tropics

Donald F. Hartle

Friday, December 10

Al
Harr

Honk and Horace

Or, Trimming the Tropics



HONK & HORACE



or, TRIMMING
the TROPICS

by EMMET
F. HARTE

Illustrated

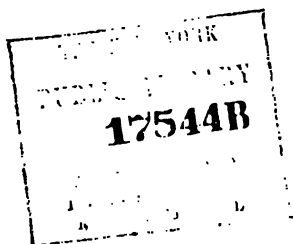
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Honk and Horace

To Robert Mackay

*In grateful acknowledgment of his unflagging
loyalty to Honk and Horace through
thick and thin, this volume is
inscribed by the Author*

W J K 19 FEB '36

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Honk and Horace

OR, TRIMMING THE TROPICS

CHAPTER I

WE GET STARTED

UST a minute! Hancock Simpson—more familiarly known by the euphonious sobriquet of Honk—is not the hero of this tale; neither do I arrogantly relegate to myself said enviable distinction; in fact, after due deliberation, we have decided that the yarn doesn't develop a hero anywhere in it. Heroism, and heroics, don't seem to flourish in our kind of common clay. There's too much hazard involved. Let Lionel van Antwerp clamber up the dizzy heights, clinging by his eyebrows and the skin of his teeth, to pluck at last the sprig of edelweiss for his dimpled Ethelberta, and good luck to him! But neither Honk nor I are seeking encomiums as exponents of personal risk.

This is hardly a love tale; it scarce qualifies as a ringing narrative of wild freebooter, or swashbuckling blade; nor is it much of a chronicle of wrongs righted, or rights wronged. Let us say rather it is a near-epic of the tropics; hot air, luxuriant vegetation, work, play, bananas, *manana*, burnt sienna, accompanied by the usual whimsies of fortune, and a sprinkling of vicissitudes, to give it spice. And—but, ah yes, beg pardon!

"Horace," said Honk to me, "in brief, the scheme is as follows, viz., and to wit: This old chanticleer I've been trying to tell you about—Jotham P. Stringfellow, by name—is worth, well, say forty-five million dollars. He made it in wheat, largely—"

"I beg pardon," I interrupted, "but was he a bovine or a bruin?"

"As to that, I'm uninformed; but I'll find out for you, some time, if you'll quit interrupting me when I'm talking. To continue, please: Jotham P. made all this money before he arrived at the age of fifty—forty-five millions, I believe I said. All right.

"What does he do, after having did it? Start up a corner in cotton, to make a try at doubling his holdings in one season? No'm.

Not Jotham P. He knows they're laying for him. He, therefore, invests certain small change in an eighty-foot, sea-going yacht, big enough to climb up one side and down the other of all ordinary waves, and he takes a trip.

"Down around the West Indies and the Bahamas and the Mosquito Coast. Round those little snuff-colored corners of the world, he potters about, and noses into this, that and the other, for many, many, long summery months. However, it was winter up North at the time.

"Ever stop to think of that peculiar trait in people, Horace? No sooner do they get their talons on a few bushels of scads, than they immediately reverse the seasons. Instead of staying where they are, for a month or two longer, when the season would adjust itself to what they want, in January they split for Palm Beach where it's warm. Then, naturally, in August they're trying to get at least one foot inside the Arctic Circle, when, if they'd pause to consider, assuming of course that they're blessed with one of those things you consider with—if, I say, they'd stop to think, why, they could have summer at home, in August, and win-

ter in January, without stirring outside the front gate."

"Go on with your Caribbean Sea story," I interposed. "I've read all that about reversing the seasons, and turning night into day, and so forth. Chop it."

"Oh, very well! But Jotham P. was different, after all. He combined business with pleasure, thus throwing two stones at one *avis*. He stopped long enough in places to learn the names of streets, and to get acquainted with the clerk in the corner drug-store. It may have been that, deep down in Jotham's sight-seeing soul, he harbored an ambition to buy or annex and own all for himself, one of those little sweet do-nothing countries down there. At any rate, he procrastinated and investigated along, circumspectly, and, at last, in the course of time and tide, touched at the port of Santa Maria. Know where that is?

"Peru," I hazarded, "or Cuba? Madagascar? Terra del —"

"Certainly not!" Honk said hastily. "Santa Maria is on the Bay of Bonagua; and the Bay of Bonagua is the finest deep-water harbor you'll find, if you comb the coast of the Caribbean, from Cape Catoche to the

Barbados, with a fine-toothed comb. Ten fathoms of blue water smack up against the bank. Coral built, Horace. The most marvelous cement work in the world. Jotham P. was quick to see the strong points of that harbor. He liked it, and, as he couldn't take it with him, he picketed the yacht—"

"Anchored," I suggested. "Anchored, I'm told, is the nautical term in vogue for staking, hobbling, or otherwise securing a floating craft of any kind so it will not run away."

"Thanks," he said, "old salt, yours truly. Where were we? He tethered the yacht and spent some time ashore. And if he was pleased with the Bay of Bonagua, what must have been his delight to find on shore his identical golden dream come true?

"It was a land stuffed to the bursting point with what he was looking for. Fruit, coffee, rubber, spices and hardwoods; square miles upon square miles of the stuff, but all undeveloped. With the eye of a man worth forty-five millions but still hungry, he saw the ground-floor plan of a Great Scheme.

"All that country needed was a railroad and a line of steamers, as a sort of spigot

inserted where it would tap the store of goodies, and out would spurt a flood of richness delightful to behold. I'll lay you a small, imaginary sum that his eyes glistened and his mouth slavered at the thought. And so he made haste to corral the coral bay.

"Incidentally, he obtained a few railroad concessions, and also nailed several strips of coffee lands and a mahogany forest or two, on suspicion. Jotham P. has already attended to these matters.

"There remains to be accomplished the actual work of inserting the spigot—the building and equipping of the railroad, the establishment of wharves for freight, and docks for steamers. In his hour of need, when one good man is worth a hundred numskulls, and he knows it, and can afford to take his pick, where does he turn?"

"I'll take the job," I said. "It will just suit me. We might have arranged it an hour ago, without all this gibber, if time is any object. What's the salary to start on? And where is the place, by the way?"

"Keep your rompers on, just a second," he returned. "You haven't been offered the job—as yet! It's me that was chose. I, me,

myself. I am to be chief engineer and boss of construction, for the Honduras Tropical Products Company, this year building some fifty miles of standard-gauge tracks into the interior, thereby opening up a new supply of the luscious 'banan, ten cent' a doz.' Jotham P. Stringfellow came all the way to my own doorstep to secure me. I asked for a day to consider his propositions, but he wouldn't wait; he has already raised my salary twice substantially, and—"

"But where do I come in?" I demanded with some asperity. "Why should I have all this inflicted upon me, unless I am sought somehow or somewhere? And if I am, why hem and haw and keep it from me?"

"There you go again. I was just getting to that. I included you in the negotiations. You have been signed on, sight unseen, as first assistant to the construction engineer. You're also to be called superintendent of materials and supplies. Your salary has been raised—once."

I expressed a mild curiosity as to what I was getting after the latest boost. Honk apparently felt a bit elated over having obtained so lavish a compensation for me, whatever it was. He threw out his chest with much gusto.

"One hundred and fifty per," he said bumptiously.

I allowed my nose to uptilt somewhat disdainfully. Only a paltry hundred and fifty, and that after one raise—I was not impressed as much as I had expected.

"One-fifty per week," he explained. I beamed a little.

"That's more like it," I was forced to admit. "Is it paid in money or stock? When do we commence drawing salary?"

"The Belle of the South leaves Galveston for Santa Maria Thursday noon. She is one of the H. T. P. Company's freight steamers. There are several others to be bought later. She carries machinery, tools, supplies, and such primary necessities; also a force of such men as various shipping agencies may be able to assemble on short notice. You and I will sail on the Belle of the South. Could you favor me with what is known as a small chew?" Honk asked.

I experienced a keener enthusiasm during the few days that intervened between this conversation and Thursday noon than I remember having enjoyed since attending my first street carnival at the exuberant age of sixteen.

The tiresome details of making purchases of this, that, and some more essential impedimenta for an extended sojourn in a strange land, and other preparatory preliminaries, I will skip lightly over.

I'll summarize by saying that we had four big trunkfuls of traps, ninety per centum of which we later found to be unnecessary, ready for shipment when, on the date set for sailing, we lounged along the sea-wall that engirds the island city.

Stringfellow happened in, by special train from either New York or San Francisco, Wednesday evening. He sent word to Honk, and we called at his hotel. During a long and more or less public career as ticket-seller here and there over the country, I have frequently observed human nature pointblank, thereby becoming familiar with various types.

Millionaires, mountebanks, merchants, mendicants — the denizens of the tall grass and the short — I read faces with the facility of a fortune-teller giving a dollar reading for two bits.

When ushered into the private dining-room with its table laid with platters for six, I naturally trained my analytical eye

on the four men already present, so soon as the formalities of introduction were attended to.

It seemed that the entire personnel of the Honduras Tropical Products Company was present. Taken in a body, they didn't impress me much, somehow. They struck me as an average quartet of men who didn't remind me of anything out of the ordinary.

Jotham P. Stringfellow seemed an affable, well-fed, nicely curried kind of a person. He looked capable, bathed, sophisticated and contented—just the sort of man I'd select to squeeze a bunch of shorts, endow a college, foreclose on a widow, or pay fifty thousand for a bogus old master. His hand was warm, moist and clean.

George R. Latham was a fine, large blond, with gold teeth and a cleft chin.

Maurice H. Cabell looked to be forty-six, was gray at the temples, wore glasses, a mustache trimmed to a triangular bristle, diamonds, and an air both ministerial and saturnine.

Edwin E. Kingsland was thirty some odd, fat, rubicund and gabby; he was the freshly shaved, bay-rummy, story-telling, loud-laughing, cigar-drummer kind of a sport you find in the front row everywhere.

There was much long-winded pow-wow-ing for an hour or two — ponderous and involved prolixity — which, after all was said, really amounted to very little. Wine sparkled, and the curling vapor of fragrant



"I recall that Honk insisted on congratulating the hotel bell boy on his striking resemblance to Julius Cæsar."

perfectos eddied above us in clouds of the hue of the summer sky.

Later on, somebody told a story, somebody else proposed a toast, and there was laughter. More cigars were brought, and

more business was or wasn't discussed. Then still some one else proposed a toast—to the American Eagle (in rouleau of ten) or the Belle of the South, maybe it was, and Latham dozed in his chair with an auriferous smile on his face.

Then Honk and I said good night and sought our own apartment, good-humoredly.

I recall that Honk insisted on congratulating the hotel bell boy who piloted us, on his striking resemblance to Julius Cæsar.

The morrow, with whatever hazard of fortune it might bring, came promptly on schedule. We rose somewhere about the middle of the forenoon, breakfasted and went on board ship. Stringfellow and his party came down to see the Belle of the South pull out. They gave us Godspeed and parting admonitions.

"Hustle now, boys," said Jotham P. "Build us fifty miles of road by this day six months, and there'll be five thousand extra to divide between you two!"

Now that sounded fair enough and we took it at its face value. Five thousand isn't wealth untold; nevertheless it looks good in your bank book. The H. T. P. Company standing round about, however, viewed

Jotham P.'s offer in the light of a clever quip; they neighed with laughter.

Later, when the fat jokers had hied themselves to the shore and the Belle of the South was being limbered up for sailing, Honk and I puzzled over the seeming frivolity of our employers.

"What were they laughing at?" I inquired. "Did you notice anything of a facetious nature in our contract? You don't suppose they're going to expatriate us into a hornet's nest of some kind, or that they don't intend to pay us, or something ulterior like that, do you? Maybe we'd better inquire into —"

"Calm yourself, Horace," said Honk reassuringly. "Do not allow yourself to become agitated by morbid forebodings. It's childish. Those gentlemen were but filled with good humor and high spirits because of the propitious aspect of things. Don't worry about imaginary difficulties. Old Jotham P. knows what we'll do down there, if the others don't. We'll show 'em all the trick it's done with shortly. Fifty miles of track in six months? Ha! Give us half a chance, and we'll make 'em cackle on the other side of their mouths, I'll bet you."

"Very well, *mon* colonel," I said. "Where you dare to lead I'll follow."

At the same time it makes me sore to have anybody cachinnate when I'm about to do 'em a favor. It makes me vindictive in after years, and I have a very convenient and dependable memory for such things when pay-day comes.

CHAPTER II

ON THE WATERY WASTE



'M satisfied that with proper training, I would have made a sailor to beat W. Clark Russell's finest. I knew this almost as soon as I got both feet on board the Belle of the South.

I was as steady on my pins as an iron dog; the ship was heaving and tugging at her stay-chains quite noticeably, too.

Of course the harbor wasn't the open sea, but the waves were, if anything, really very choppy where we were. And looking toward the outer—er, free range of the gulf spread out toward the south—great splatters!

There was a lot of water tumbling around in sight.

There were fifty or a hundred heterogeneous, hanky-panky-looking buccaneers scattered around in groups on the deck; glowering, weather-beaten, cutthroaty, un-

kempt villains they appeared to me, most of 'em. And these were our men — recruited from the riffraff and rubbish of several cities through shipping agents.

Honk glanced about him and instantly assumed all the swaggering air of a pirate captain. You could see that he was pleased with that outfit on the very jump.

"Fine lot of lads," he commented. "Look at that young Ajax over there in the striped sweater! Neck and shoulders like a gladiator. All thew and vitality. That's the kind of blood you want for empire-building. Let's go over and slap a few of 'em on the back."

I followed along behind, dutifully — but I let Honk do the slapping. I carry a life policy, but it has no suicide permit in it, nor do I get anything for total disablement. Young Ajax responded heartily to Honk's overtures.

"Greetings, Ulysses," quoth Honk lightly, "and hail to the Argonauts! The Golden Fleece looks good to us, eh?"

He that was addressed thus allegorically, looked around with a clouded brow, scrutinizing Honk much as a gorilla might if suddenly addressed by an impecunious orang-

utan who asked for the loan of a coconut till Saturday.

He then winked at his companions, and returned Honk's friendly slap by an elbow jab in the ribs that made my compatriot grunt harshly.

"Why, howdy, high-pockets!" he belowed playfully. "How's your liver?"

I've often pondered over the fact that a goat will butt in and insert himself wherever and whenever he pleases, but get wrathful in a minute if you pull his whiskers.

Honk got as sore as an ulcerated tooth.

"You—you big mutt!" he sputtered. "What's the matter with you? Whatcher think I am? A punching bag? I've a notion to kick you off this boat, you—you plug-ugly!"

Everybody roared with laughter, Ajax included.

"S-st!" I whispered in an aside to the pirate nearest me. "Cheese it! This man—" I indicated Honk by a wiggle of my thumb — "is the boss! You guys better get on the good side of him."

It had the desired effect. The man sidled through the group, muttering first out of one corner of his mouth and then out of the other. "It's the *boss*! Cut it out!"

Enjoyment subsided, grins faded and hilarity froze to death in its tracks. The boss doesn't need to be a big, brawny duffer, with a fist like a maul; there is a potency in his title.

"Er—excuse *me!*" stammered Ajax, abashed. "Er—not knowing who you was, I guess maybe I got fresh. I hope you won't hold it against me, sir?"

Oh, subtle power of flattery, soothing lotion that thou art! Honk thawed like butter in July. A balmy smile replaced his frown. Dirt yields to washing-powder, ink to acids, and paint may be scraped or burnt off, but for erasing a scowl there's nothing that surpasses soft soap.

"All right, men," said Honk, "we'll let it go at that. I'd ought to have introduced myself. Now we're acquainted, we'll no doubt get along first rate. I'll check up you lads this afternoon and see who's which. Want you all to be free to talk to me at any time, but—" he addressed the latter remark to Ajax—"watch out for my ribs, please. I'd hate to have six or eight of 'em smashed just passing the time of day, as it were."

We next paid our respects to the skipper

of the skiff, whom as yet we had met only momentarily in a brief introduction when we came on board.

Captain Walter Toomey was his name, and right here, please jot down a few foot-



Captain Toomey.

notes *in re* Captain Toomey, for he was a type, typographically, spilled from the original linotype.

He was a pudgy-faced, round dough-ball of a man, leathery-skinned, sharp-eyed, hoarse-voiced, and with a husky laugh that

seemed to start in his bronchial tubes and jiggle all through him before it burst out.

He had a way of catching your hand in a sidewise slap when he shook hands, and then squeezing the juice out of it and dropping it without further concern.

You could throw it away, or wrap it up and save it as a souvenir, or suit yourself about what you did with it afterward for all of Captain Toomey.

He struck me as being a man who would get you in a corner, if he got a good chance, and choke you to death with his own autobiography. A friendly, fussy, flubdubby sort of a martinet of a man, who'd temporize with a superior, familiarize with an equal, and patronize an inferior; but he had the salty look and rolling stride of a sea-dog, withal, and the buffet and slash of many a spray-laden gale had etched cat-tracks in his facial front elevation.

"Simpson," he rumbled; "that's a good Yankee name. And you, young feller, what's the name again? Harris, eh? You look healthy. All your dunnage 'board ship, gen'leman? We h'ist anchor in just one minute, now."

We assured him that we would lay no

straw in his way. As far as we were concerned he might hip, hip and away whenever he felt the mood come over him. With some other light exchange of pleasantry, we left him for the purpose of hunting up our cubby-holes — to say staterooms would be a misstatement — and to get settled down to feeling at home.

The Belle of the South wasn't as big a ship as she looked to me at that time. Comparing her waist and skirt measurements with those of some of the transatlantic amazons, she'd have attracted about as much attention as a ten-penny nail would in a keg of spikes; but ranging her alongside a sixteen-foot motor-boat, which was the only kind of craft I'd ever voyaged in extensively prior to that time, she was a slam-banging big ship.

As to that, everything is but a matter of comparison anyway. A mouse looks big to a microbe.

I recall asking Honk whether she was a sloop, a schooner, a barkentine, or a frigate, and he told me at the time, but I forget, now, which she was. Before we got across, I distinctly remember hearing him call her a scow. "A wallowing hog of a scow," I think were his exact words.

I mentioned quarters in the cabin, or walled-in portion of the ship. Such an allusion was merely to add a certain dignity to our traveling accommodations.

We didn't occupy the said apartment. I like my oven, but O you kiln! No, when it came to the actual swelter of it, we slept outside on the deck with the rest of the animals.

But I'm getting the propeller tangled up with the bowsprit. We were just in the act of h'isting anchor, weren't we?

Well, we warped out of the harbor all right, promptly as advertised. A great sensation that, bearing outward and onward from the solid shore on the teetering bosom of the wobbly deep. Very imposing and grandiose and inspiring, to say the least.

You feel the pulsing swell of the throbbing waste of waters under your feet; you see the prow of your staunch ship cleaving the glassy, green waves; and you hear the creaking and muttering of the engines, and the whine of the breeze through the foretop or whatever you call it.

It's very invigorating and — er — appetizing, the first day. Which reminds me of what we had to eat on board the Belle of the South.

The first meal we had was dinner; not supper, dinner. Honk and I were inclined to overlook a great many shortcomings in that dinner, because we believed that things hadn't settled down into their regular routine.

We tried not to appear picayunish and faultfinding, anyhow, right at the outset; but, frankly, I've been personally acquainted with many a pig who'd've squealed himself to death rather than offend his palate with the food that that cook concocted for us to eat.

There was a kind of solid I believe they call "salt horse" that was a libel on salt and a scurrilous imputation on the fair name of a worthy domestic animal; there was sea-biscuit—also misleading—moldy crackers were better; there were likewise beans that should have been put to cooking a day earlier; potatoes that had been cooked at least a day too long; then there was a weird, pulpy, glutinous mess of something called "pudding"—however, let's ignore that entirely.

We washed the whole business down, regardless of what might result, with a solution of quinia, gypsum, and ipecacuanha,

masquerading under the reassuring designation of "tea."

That cook was nothing more nor less than an alchemist.

We ate at the captain's table, by courtesy. Captain Toomey seemed to relish the grub. I kept one ear cocked throughout the meal in the expectation of hearing him apologize, or make some sort of excuse for the diabolical fare. He didn't.

However, he told one long story and two or three short ones, during the sitting. A sort of popular fiction treat, as it were. I'm not sure but he had one special article as well.

It, if I remember rightly, was on wireless telegraphy. He said wireless telegraphy was the biggest fake since the Keely motor. Whereupon, he and Honk locked horns, and I went on deck to watch for flying fish. During the course of my stroll, I happened upon the man at the wheel, and learned considerable about navigation and the wonders of the sea.

I asked him if the water was very deep where we then were. He stated definitely that the Gulf of Mexico was bottomless; but he told me soon afterward that he'd

seen any number of sea-serpents, so I gave him credit for a rather fluent and emotional narrative style. I also gave him a chew, and he took a good one.

At two o'clock, or four bells, whichever you prefer—it's immaterial to me—Honk tore loose from Captain Toomey, and we marshaled our gang of pirates together for a little check-up and experience meeting.

We secured their names and other little items of interest from them, one by one, true and false, arranged alphabetically, and set down in my handwriting in a black-backed book. After which we talked over prospects, wages, difficulties, plans, aims, and obstacles at some length.

Our friend Ajax was named Doran Watts; he was last on the list; the head man was named Akes. He almost gave me a pain.

They were a fine, shaggy bunch; still, they weren't as bad as they were barbered when tried and tested later. I doubt if there was a thug among them who had done anything worse than commit murder, arson or larceny; therefore, they were all right for our purposes.

Some of them, at former periods, may have been moved to consecrate their lives

to the service of the Big Joss, Booze, from appearances, but the constitution backs a man up in almost every kind of fanatical idiosyncrasy. If one desires to offer up his stomach as a burnt offering to J. Barley-corn, the law says he shall be permitted to blaze away.

Before supper-time the Belle of the South was steaming afar across the bounding waves. We were out of sight of land. In all directions stretched a fuming, restless turmoil of wet, green water. We mounted one billow, tumbled over the crest and scooted down the other side, only to encounter another just like it.

There seemed to be an unending supply of them. I could not exactly understand what was causing such a commotion in the Gulf. The wind wasn't blowing a gale particularly and the sun was shining like "what is so rare as a day in June?" I spoke to my friend the wheelman about the matter.

"What's agitating the upper surface of the deep so noticeably?" I asked. "These breakers are fierce, methinks."

"Try me once more with that one," he said. "I've got a sty in one of my ears."

"The waves," I said. "The wild billows. The rolling upheaval of the souse. What's the cause of it? Why does it do it?"

He emitted a barbarian roar of amusement.

"Waves?" he echoed. "These ain't waves, they're ripples. Why, the Gulf's as smooth as a frogpond! Waves! Breakers! Er—haw! Haw! Haw!"

His hilarity became so aggravated that Captain Toomey was compelled to admonish him. His emotions were causing him to neglect his duties, in consequence of which the ship sought to sidle around unnoticed and make a sneak for Galveston.

When Honk and I took our places at the supper table, I thought he acted a bit strained and distrait. His manner was pre-occupied; he toyed with his salt horse in a lackadaisical, dispirited way, quite different from his habitual table enthusiasm.

But the supper was, if possible, worse than the preceding meal, so I laid it to that. My own interest had cloyed in ship's fare, as well. I felt a sadness, and premonitions of impending disaster.

Captain Toomey was untroubled by disquieting emotions, however. He attacked

his food noisily and cleaned up a platterful while I was rounding up my skittish coffee cup. The captain favored the grab and gulp method of feeding.

"I hardly looked for so rough a passage, captain," remarked Honk, as he spilled some sugar in his vest pocket and flung the spoon into the gravy dish.

"Rough?" repeated the skipper, nonplused. "Did you say rough?"

"I said rough," Honk reiterated with emphasis. "Boisterous, riotous, demoralizing. Ugh!" and without waiting for a reply to his outburst, Honk at that instant rose and dashed from the banquet hall, like a cat about to have a fit.

"Humph!" grunted Captain Toomey, pausing between bites. "Seasick, I wonder? Seasick on a sea o' glass! Whatchethink o' that? Pass the beans to Harris, Mr. McClintock; the young man ain't eatin'."

I had managed, just before that, to worry down one or two mouthfuls of corned beef and cabbage. I thought at the time the stuff tasted queer, but I had no suspicion of its true malignancy.

I am convinced that it must have been reeking with ptomains—and the ptomains were what did the work.

Mal de mer? No. I hope I am no weakling to give way to a foolish disorder that properly belongs among women and children. Strong, virile, red-blooded men do not fall victims to mal de mer.



"Honk rose and dashed from the banquet hall."

That being the case, it must follow inevitably that I was poisoned. I rather favor the conjecture that Honk was seasick, but

I maintain that mine was a case of ptomains, undoubtedly.

Also a very severe case of the disease, as I diagnosed it at first. Later, I lost interest in it; I lost interest in everything; the roll and heave of the ship seemed to aggravate and prolong my sufferings — in that particular I resembled Honk, who, as I said before, was merely seasick.

I know now what a wrench it is to shuffle off this mortal coil of ours. I'm very tenacious of life. A great many people would have us believe that life is a frail evanescent, gossamer thread that may be snipped off by the least little gust of adverse wind, but that's a mistake.

When a man writhes in the death struggle two days, experiencing all the agonies of a dozen dissolutions, and can't sever the tie that binds him to this terrestrial sphere, it's time to relegate those old foggy notions to the archives.

Honk and I recovered about the same time. There came a day when the film unrolled from our eyes and we sat up weakly and took stock of our surroundings. There was the same watery waste about us, over which flitted the nimble flying fishes. The

Belle of the South still careened and wallowed her way along. Captain Toomey's stodgy form still paced monotonously back and forth across the piazza, or the plaza, or the poop-deck, or whatever they call it; and our company of brawny buccaneers still played cards and wrangled and dozed under the awnings on deck.

We took a little weakened water as nourishment, and, at eight bells, felt better. Honk essayed a promenade up forward but ultimately landed in the lee scuppers all crumpled up. One of the sailors fished him out and replaced him on the camp stool by my side. It was then that he made the allusion characterizing the vessel we were on as a "scow," et cetera.

"How long have we been limping, rearing and hippety-hopping along trying to get across this little two-for-a-nickel stretch of water, anyway?" he asked. "Three days, a week, a fortnight, or what?"

"Don't ask me," I returned disconsolately. "I've had ptomain poisoning; I've been *hors de compass* since Thursday, a month or six weeks ago, to the best of my recollection. Ask one of the galley slaves, over there."

He did so. The sailor said it was Satur-

day, and that if we kept afloat till noon we 'd have been out two days, and that we 'd had a fine trip so far and ought to come in sight of land Sunday morning bright and early.

"What land?" I asked, feeling a curiosity to know.

"Yucatan coast."

"Sure," said Honk. "We then enter the Caribbean. By rights we ought to get to Santa Maria some time during Monday night. The old scow isn't doing so worse, after all. She walks the waters almost like a thing of life."

We took our places at the dinner table without any heraldry or hullabaloo, yet Captain Toomey was disposed to rally us a little. In a reciprocal spirit, Honk remarked about the viands on the table. He expressed a desire to partake of an old-fashioned Pottawattomie pug-dog stew, or a porcupine potpie, as welcome titbits in comparison to the ship's menu.

"Horace, help yourself to some of this mule steak," he said, tendering the corned beef. "And kindly give that butter my respects and a push; maybe it will run this way!"

His persiflage didn't make much of a hit, however. The captain and other ship's officers were too busy at their feeding.

Captain Toomey presently unbent and narrated a complete novelette, in which a lighthouse keeper, or a beach-comber, or somebody somewhere on the bleak Carolina coast, rescued a society bud from the Inchcape Rock or the Old Witch Reef, married her, and afterward became cashier of his father-in-law's bank, where he tapped the till to the tune of two hundred thousand—an alliteration as well as an embezzlement—and, when last heard of, had braved Brazil on foot, penetrated Paraguay, achieved Argentine, crossed Chile, and sailed from Santiago for either Australia or Abyssinia.

A modern magazine story in all except the climax; the climax escaped before he got to it. This did not diminish the actual charm of the story in any respect—to Captain Toomey. He laughed heartily.

The afternoon passed rather draggingly. We sat on deck, and eschewed supper.

Sunday morning they took the ship's position according to the Geodetic Survey and Dr. Somebody's Nautical Almanac, tested the chronometer and the wind velocity, rain-

fall in minutes and seconds and relative position of the sun to the curvature of the earth multiplied by the altitude, posted up the log, boxed the compass, and steered a new course, sou' east, sou' by sou' west, with a handicap of four points by guess, as near as I could gather.

"I suppose you know all this coast like a book?" Honk remarked to Captain Toomey. "The Bay of Bonagua and Santa Maria especially."

"I ought to," quoth the captain with some warmth. "I've been v'yaging 'round in these waters since they first named the Caribbean Sea. I've freighted bananas and lumber and other perishables out o' this end o' the world for over forty years now, and more. I remember —"

"What for a town is Santa Maria?" asked Honk, inserting the question deftly.

"Santa Maria? Same as all the rest. You can't tell one from another off of a ship's deck. Mud huts, pa'm trees, kids by the dozen, and lazy blacks squattin' along the shore. Once in a while there's a few more tin roofs to one town than some other one; that's a sign there's more whites in it. Grass roofs for natives, and tin for whites."

Sunday afternoon we passed Belize and through a glass saw the English flag floating above the government headquarters. I mean a spy-glass. The British are quiet, civilized, law-abiding folks, but the regular Central Americans, Captain Toomey said, weren't so particular that way.

He said if a real, downright, sorrel-colored, bred-in-the-bone Central American had positive knowledge that you couldn't savvy his language, he wasn't above calling you names to your face.

After dog-watch we steamed off-shore again and lost ourselves in the Caribbean. It was so hot the sea caught fire. I went to sleep and dreamed that Dante and I were on another of those infernal trips of his.

All day Monday we plowed a furrow south and east, or some such direction. Sometimes we were in sight of the palms and rocky knobs of the shore line, and sometimes we were over the ridge.

Darkness caught us again in the middle of nowhere; but, about ten-thirty, the skipper consulted his maps and specifications, squinted at the dog-star and the great bear, crossed his fingers and spat over the side, and ordered the ship turned square around

in her tracks and steered along an imaginary line for Santa Maria.

At midnight they dropped the anchor with a mighty splash and the rattling of chains, and lay quiet a quarter of a mile from a dark, shadowy mass of land. To all intents and purposes we had arriv' at our destination. We weren't in such a hurry but that we could wait till morning to disembark, so everybody went back to his snoozes.

Daylight disclosed a 'dobe village, with a grass bungalow squatting here and there, ranged along the shore. I looked for tin roofs but could not see one, so I concluded that the place was devoid of whites. However, we could soon remedy that defect. Several smoke-colored persons came down to the water's edge, embarked in various craft, and paddled out to welcome us.

The captain was brisk, businesslike and bossish. In a brief space of time he had all hands working like mad unloading cargo into dingy, launch and lighter. Machinery, crates, cases, kegs, caddies and barrels went merrily over the side and were whisked to the beach where Honk and I checked 'em off according to the way-bills.

Our gallant company of sixty-nine des-



“Several smoke-colored persons embarked in various craft and paddled out to welcome us.”

peradoes worked in unison with the crew of the ship.

The entire population of the town gathered on the beach to watch the invaders. It was the busiest day ever seen in the village, no doubt.

Among the spectators was a sunburned man who looked civilized but too tired to talk. That he had once been white was apparent, and his speech was United States when wormed out of him. He turned out to be Uncle Sam's representative, and his name was Herbert Perkins.

Honk dropped a few hints of the plans and prospects of the H. T. P. Company, all of which interested him mightily. Presently he began laughing to himself, and seemed highly amused for the space of time it took to transfer three or four boatloads to shore, after which he regained his gravity enough to explain, brokenly.

"Boys," he said, "there's so little happens down here to divert a fellow, you'll have to excuse me. I appreciate your coming to relieve the monotony, real sincerely. I do, by George! But I'm obliged to tell you that this isn't Santa Maria, where you are supposed to land. This is Puerto Nuevo.

Santa Maria is fifty miles or such a matter up the coast. That's what I was laughing at."

"Hey! Stop that unloading!" yelled Honk to the boatmen. "Take me out to that old tub yonder. I want to hold some converse with that frog-headed Toomey!"

"Somewhat of a hot-tempered youngster, ain't he?" Perkins remarked to me, as we watched Honk clamber up and swing his long legs over the rail of the Belle of the South. "What a waste of energy!"

On deck we saw two figures, a tall one and a short—both gesticulating fiercely. And there floated to us the sound—but never mind! The words were not polite.

CHAPTER III

BEAUTIFUL SANTA MARIA



APTAIN TOOMEY was very decided, not to say radical, in his stand. He insisted that we were at Santa Maria, all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding. He attempted to prove his theory by the charts, the log-book, the astrolabe, and the compass; he traced the course of the *Belle of the South* inch by inch across the Gulf, through the channel, and into the Caribbean, right down to the exact spot where the hitchweight had been flung into the sharky waters of the roadstead.

He swore hoarsely by the pitchfork of Neptune that if we weren't at that moment in the Bay of Bonagua, off Santa Maria, he'd eat chart, almanac, and log with gusto — he'd be cussed if he wouldn't!

Honk told him no less warmly that there was little doubt but that he could eat 'em with a relish; that anybody who could subsist on the class of ostrich and goat food

served on board the *Belle* of the South wouldn't quibble at a little light appetite-teaser like a printed page or two, or even a few tin cans mixed in to give the same more of a miscellaneous garbage flavor. Whereupon the skipper swore a volley that cracked a mirror in the first mate's cabin, broke three spokes out of the wheel, shook out the jib-boom, and caused every rat on board to leap into the bay.

The two of them finally came ashore, and the captain was introduced to Perkins. We four then went up-town—some two blocks—and had a drink of the famous beverage invented by Apollo, called apollinaris—on the side—smoked a few consular cigars, and had a Hague conference over a goat's meat, eggs, et cetera, dinner.

By the combined pressure brought to bear on Perkins, backed by state papers, Rand & McNally, three bottles of beer, and the testimony of several unsubsidized citizens of Puerto Nuevo, we convinced Captain Toomey finally that he had landed us at the wrong place, and he gave orders to reload cargo.

Everybody took another drink, shook hands, and parted friends. Perkins prom-

ised to run over to Santa Maria to see us on his next decennial leave of absence, and about sundown we steamed on our way.

It was either the same night or the one following when we got there. It was night, anyhow. Everybody on board woke up when they let down the anchor.

Dropping anchor on the Belle of the South sounded like the whole forward end of the vessel was being ripped asunder with nail-pullers and forceps, and then the detached portion was run through a grater.

Honk and I, together with our sturdy sixty-nine henchmen, scrambled to the rail to see what geographical cataclysm was taking place; in my half-awakened state, I vaguely imagined that we had tried to climb Mont Pelée and had been hurled back by a mighty blast from Pluto's own blowpipe. But no.

About us, in the moonlight, laved and danced the phosphorescent waters of a wonderful landlocked bay.

Encircling us lay shadowy arms, gray and blurred, hairy with royal palms. Before us, where the sea lapped, in a line of molten gold rippling against the white sands of the shore, Santa Maria slumbered silently,

bathed in moonglow, a fairy city etched on the canvas of night, pallid against its background of tangled forest.

"Say, mister!" breathed Honk, enraptured. "Isn't that a fine picture? A regular half-tone in color. Nature is the supreme artist, Horace. Man daubs and splatters around with a few pigments on a canvas, and fondly imagines he's painting a picture, but when it comes to harmony and tones and color-values, a little dab of moonlight spread along the shore of a coral bay has 'em all chewing their nails, my boy. There's nothing in the salon to compare with it."

"Ain't that the truth?" I agreed. "Hurrah for nature! I wonder if we can get a decent breakfast in this art-chromo town, in the morning?"

"Ah," he returned, pleased at the mention of eating. "I'll tell you what I'd like to have for breakfast, since you've brought up the subject. A large steak, cooked just so; three brown-backed, flaky, buttered rolls; eggs — I'll break 'em in the cup myself, and I'll salt and pepper 'em myself, and put in a few bread-crumbs and some butter — um! — and then I want two cups of coffee, with

cream in a silver pitcher, and four cubes of sugar, please; and —”

I turned away, unable to listen longer without giving vent to my emotions. There was nothing to do but tough it out till morning, and gabbling about what one would like to have wasn't going to make the wait any easier.

The tropic dawn burst in time, with all its riot of color, and the stir of multitudinous life above and around us. Gaudy macaws cackled and shrieked in the palms, dogs fought along the sea-front, smoke curled and arose from mud ovens, and the world thereabouts got busy about its business.

Santa Maria had more of a lively air to it than Puerto Nuevo; there seemed a kind of animation in the town, and there were tin roofs, too—several of them. There was a dock and a row of wooden sheds in the foreground, with a market-place just beyond where fruit merchants were getting ready to display their baskets of provender.

“Horace and I will slip ashore for breakfast,” Honk remarked to Captain Toomey. “I reckon you'll begin discharging cargo without delay?”

The skipper swore a large, purple, mouth-filling oath. "I want the two of ye to satisfy yourselves you're where you want to go, first," he bellowed loudly.

"Oh, that's all right," Honk laughed. "This is Santa Maria, I guess. I think you'll be safe in unloading the stuff this time. You can start up your derricks as soon as you've gulped down your morning chuck."

Nevertheless, the belligerent captain insisted on waiting until we had gone up to the city and looked over the records, as he called them."

"Get all the evidence ye can find, and bring the mayor and the consul and so forth to make affidavits," he growled, "and then I'll think it over."

He came very nearly doing just that, too. We were compelled to make a formal declaration, witnessed by the entire ship's crew, that we shouldered all responsibility for errors, before a solitary caddy was shifted or a tackle creaked. And we felt grateful besides that the captain didn't insist on thirty days' notice in writing.

Honk and I were far and away more genial and human toward everybody after our breakfast on shore. Neither he nor I lost our temper in the least.

"Why, tut-tut!" said Honk cheerfully. "Let the old porcupine rip. Can't you imagine the state the man's digestive apparatus must be in, after twenty or seventy or whatever number of years it was he said he'd been eating salt-mule and sea-biscuit? Horace, I'll bet you his soul is covered with wire-edged corrugations and rows of teeth like a rasp."

They warped the Belle of the South alongside a jetty, and unloaded our stores and machinery with neatness and despatch. Honk meanwhile hunted up the headquarters of our company, up-town, and routed out the sleepy squire who had hitherto guarded the interests of our mutual employers, on the actual ground.

The name of this worthy was Lon J. Addicks, and, aside from being a sluggard and having an unquenchable thirst, he was not unfitted for great commercial stratagems.

He spoke the Spanish lingo of the country like a native, was fever-immune and insect-proof, and he knew to the infinitesimal subdivision of a peso the price in cash of every man in authority in Honduras, when cases of civic stress arose.

He was also an Arkansan.

Honk brought him down about the stage of the forenoon when you begin to look at the clock rather balefully. After some little standing around, we left big Watts in charge



“Aside from being a sluggard, he was not unfitted for great commercial stratagems.”

of the checking of the cargo, and adjourned to a near-by rest-room, where Addicks ordered stuff in glasses which he called fatigue antidote. Then we talked.

"In this country," he remarked in his tired drawl, "we follow the line of least resistance. Never set out to do day-after-to-morrow what can just as well be postponed to a week from Saturday."

"That is apparent," said Honk. "A stranger can see it in this town of Santa Maria without being told. I see that the women still do their laundry work in the creek over there, by the ancestral method of pounding the garments on the rocks.

"By day you have sunlight, by night the moon or the stars. The mosquitoes sting everybody—some take the fever thereby; maybe they die; that's of small moment; the others are too tired to care. Ice? Electricity? Pure water? Shelter, creature comforts, social pleasures, amusements, recreations? No. Nothing doing. Everybody's taking the easiest way—the line of least resistance. Too much *hasta manana* and *poco tiempo*.

"I'll tell you what you need. You need an alarm-clock to wake you up. You watch our smoke. We'll have this loafers' paradise all spruced up and champing the bit before long."

"Every year," Addicks drawled dreamily,

"I've seen young men drop in from the North like you-all—full of vim and ginger and theories—going to shake up the dry bones and start things to buzzing. But they slow down—from a gallop to a dog-trot, and then to a shuffling walk. And finally they drop easily into a hammock under the orange-trees. Is it not so? *Bueno*. It is the way of the country. You will learn."

We smiled quiet, well-bred, inane, and contented smiles, and let it go at that. We opined that we would see what we would see later.

"If it isn't on too short notice," Honk said presently, "I'd like to make a tour of inspection over the company's holdings in Santa Maria, this afternoon. We have sixty-nine men with us that we must get settled in comfortable quarters at once."

"*Si, señors,*" said Addicks, "*esta bien*. We will make the rounds. There isn't much to see. The holdings are—well, up in the States we would say the whole business is on the bum. I shall be pleased to show you what there is."

And when we came to look over the H. T. P. Company's local properties, I rather agreed with him. The outlook was punko,

to use an Americanism. I doubt if the entire outfit, with the concession thrown in, if sold under the hammer at the east door of any inland courthouse in the States, would have provoked the bid of a battered dime.

Nevertheless, Honk seemed to see great things in it. He delved into the rubbish and decay of tumbledown sheds, noted the boundaries of the land, selected sites for various warehouses, cold-storage buildings, ice-plants, and so forth, with the zest of a pup on his first rabbit hunt.

There wasn't a single habitable building among the lot, should it happen to rain; still, if the weather continued hot and dry, I fancied our gang might be able to make out tolerably well—at least no worse than on the ship.

Shelter didn't seem to be one of the main worries of the country, anyhow. There were large families growing up in domiciles that apparently consisted of little more than a manacea palm and a view of the stars.

Honk selected the most picturesque shack in the lot, over next to the scenery—to be exact, the tropical vegetation had crowded in pretty close on two sides of it—and stated that we would establish our temporary headquarters therein.

I'm inclined to think his choice was more particularly influenced by the grass and shrubbery near by. Honk was ever an enthusiast about grass and shrubbery.

I had taken note of the utter indifference of the natives to these natural embellishments; the prevailing style of lawn in Santa Maria was an irregular patch of sun-baked earth, shaved as clear of grass and other floral accessories as the pates in the front row at a burlesque.

By scientific deduction, I readily discerned the reason for this. Grass grows with alarming rapidity in tropical climes, and grass must be regularly trimmed to preserve the scenic effect, also to keep it from obscuring the outlook and interfering with traffic.

Now, nobody down in this country is seeking to plunge himself into any unnecessary labor troubles—hence—*carrambos!* If no grass is allowed to grow, no grass will there be to cut! Simple, isn't it? *Simplicissimo.*

We had the boys lug over quilts and other sleeping paraphernalia, toward the approach of evening; we threw together, out of scrap lumber and pine packing cases, several long mess-tables, built a couple of mud ovens,

and turned the culinary department over to four regular cooks, who were assisted by native helpers.

By supper-time, we were all but starting to keep house. Such is the beauty of system.

Night descended, and with it a momentary lull, disturbed only by the faint and almost musical yelping that betokened one of the ordinary dog-controversies common in that latitude.

Not a few of our pirates were already snoring contentedly on their quilts under the twinkling stars; the majority favored sleeping outdoors, as the night promised to be a hot one.

I sat with my back against the shed wall, smoking my faithful near-meerschaum in the drowsy twilight, and trying to persuade myself that I wasn't a fool for coming down there in the first place. Honk, in the dim light of an odoriferous oil-lamp, was nodding over a map of Honduras.

Then there arose a shuffling and a rustling in the undergrowth of the near-by forest, and strong men twitched, squirmed, rolled over, and awoke.

Soon they indulged in audible comments

and loud threshing around, intermingled with phraseology suggestive of Captain Toomey in a fretful mood.

We who were in the shed joined in the disturbance within a few minutes; in fact, the entire camp was in an uproar in a short time. And the reason was not obscure.

The camp had been invaded by a bug host. A bug host of uncountable numbers, and of exceeding variety, but of a remarkable unity of mind and singleness of purpose, in that each individual bug was in a biting humor and was proud of it.

Bugs there were, big, little, microscopic, ring-streaked and striped; bugs by the bushel, and more coming; earth and air were alive with 'em.

Some merely tickled where they crawled; a few plowed a burning furrow as they went; others bit here and there without method or system, and still others burrowed in like moles where they lit.

There were also auxiliary skirmishers—the *picador* squadron—that dodged in, planted *banderillas*, and skipped away.

Honk sat up, wild-eyed; slapped a mosquito into the great beyond; and asked for news. We reported briefly that the enemy

had surprised the works and was swarming over the parapet at that moment.

Worse than that — they were overrunning drawbridge, moat, bastion and scullery. I struck a match and saw two cockroaches as big as half-grown antelopes fighting over a shoe in a corner.

"We 'll have to get out of this!" I shouted lustily. "I saw a tarantula."

"Did you, honest?" cried Honk. "Gee whizzers! Men, bring your quilts! We 'll hit for the water-front."

Seventy-one vanquished heroes straggled in motley disorder through the by-streets of Santa Maria to the docks and the white sands along the shore of the bay. There we prowled and swore and fought mosquitoes throughout the rest of the night.

"I'm wise to the whole thing now," I said, just before daybreak. "I had the wrong idea, but I'm next. I see it all now."

"Not a bit of doubt about it," coincided Honk. "What is it?"

"Why, the reason these people have no lawns around their houses. Lawns are full of bugs; that's why!"

"Humph!" he grunted. "I have a liking for lawns myself. I'm foolish about green


grass and flowers. Therefore, the bugs will have to get out. We'll eradicate this plague of insects; exterminate 'em! I'll start the crusade in the morning."

"But —" I objected.

"Don't butt in," he said. "I'm thinking."

CHAPTER IV

A BIT OF HOUSECLEANING

 HONK sat immersed in profound thought, from which he arose pawing the air ever and anon, until the bright glare of the sunlight dispersed the mosquitoes.

A mosquito is a haunter of the shadows; he grants immunity to those who have the hardihood to blister themselves against his onslaught—during the process of blistering, seek the shade, and he is at you promptly.

“First thing this A. M.,” said Honk, at breakfast, “we’ll set up our gasoline engine and one or two of our pneumatics. I’m going to build a formaldehyde blow-gun that will put the everlasting kibosh to this bug-orium round here. If you’ve got any friends amongst the insect tribe hereabouts, Horace, get ’em word, for it’s going to rain fire, brimstone, and cyanogen gas worse than any comet’s tail in these woods. Sodom and tomorrow won’t be in it.”

"Let the good work proceed," I said. "I haven't a friend among 'em."

I am pleased to acknowledge that, in case of a pinch, Honk usually procures the per-simmon. I also knew from long experience what would come next, so I produced and proffered my plug of chewing with all due deference. He tucked away a goodly portion in his cheek, and got busy.

I hadn't been aware of it before, but there were all kinds of skilled workmen among our sixty-nine adventurers: machinists, blacksmiths, carpenters, engineers, masons, plumbers, painters—a formidable array of talent, in fact.

Forges and work-benches were erected in one of the sheds, and the premises rang and clanged with hammer and tongs.

Honk, sweat-streaked and grimy, worked like Vulcan on a rush order of thunderbolts, and even I—who have a distaste for physical exertion—heaved, grunted, fitted pipes, oiled bearings, and raised a blood-blister on my thumb with zeal and enthusiasm.

Honk mounted the apparatus on wheels; he proposed to carry the work into the enemy's country; not that that meant any great distance—oh, no!

The enemy waited near at hand. A re-enforced section of four-inch steam-hose with a regulation fire-nozzle comprised the business end of the thing. Then there were air-cylinders, tanks for the fumes, and the engine that furnished the power.

She was a compound, too; fed from both back and front under pressure; and, when working at full capacity, would shoot an invisible bolt at a force sufficient to drive a nail at fifty feet.

Of course, you understand, it wouldn't drive it into armor plate, or anything of that sort. Thank you. To continue:

If, instead of ordinary compressed air, we substitute the acrid, shriveling vapor from one of the most powerful insecticides known to canning factory practice, intelligently directing this stream of sudden death into the every-day haunts and congregating places of the bug tribe, you may readily draw your own conclusions as to the results that followed.

Where we made the try-out experiment wasn't exactly a badly overrun quarter, either. There were probably in that particular shed only a couple or three million ants—large, Ethiopian, medium, Malay, and

small, North American Indian ants — maybe five bushels of flies, and a miscellaneous assortment of ticks, beetles, and spiders.

Honk manipulated the nozzle through a breach in the wall. There was a hushed moment of expectant interest, only punctuated by the puff-puff and clickety-click of the engine, and then Honk pulled the trigger.

A sputtering roar ensued while he sprayed the interior of the building, for maybe a minute and a half by a stop-watch — if we'd had one.

He then shut off, and we stood around, first on one leg and then the other, waiting for the air to clear.

After which we went inside. It was all over but the plaudits. Not a creeper, crawler, or flier was left alive, and the mortality had been considerable. At least six gunnysacks full had been swept into a heaping pile at at the far end of the shed.

There must have been an unprecedented gain in the attendance at the bug-judgment bar that day.

With noisy enthusiasm we rushed the artillery across to the barracks-shed, trained it, and cut loose. Vacuum cleaning may be all right and sanitary and hygienic on

Brownstone Boulevard, but for bug eradicating, a few cubic feet of formaldehyde vapor, compressed about a ton or so and squirted from a nozzle, is very efficacious.

After renovating the sheds, we made a systematic onslaught on the surrounding vegetation. A beautiful and satisfying feature of the thing was the fact that we didn't miss any. From the microscopic chigger to the granddaddy longlegs with feelers the length of a camera tripod, we got 'em all.

Not a fly was able to flee, or a flea fly from that blast of Avernus. It was Waterloo, Johnstown, Pompeii, and St. Bartholomew's Eve for the insect hordes of Santa Maria.

Having disinfected the vicinity of the barracks for a space of two hundred yards in width by the same distance in depth, we paused for a rest. It had been a famous victory. The prospect of a night's sleep free from all annoyance gave us cause for felicitation.

"By the by," said I brightly, "there's a row of grass bungalows over there on yonder street that's got its back turned to the sun—see 'em? Why not slip across, while we're keeping one ear cocked for the



*"With noisy enthusiasm we rushed the artillery
across to the barracks-shed."*

first call to supper, and slay a few cockroaches for our chocolate-colored neighbors?"

"A worthy and commendable idea, Horace," said Honk. "And both timely and feasible. Thank you kindly. Watts, Kelly, Schweitzmeyer, McMuir—come along, boys. We're going over to renovate that row of teepees across the way."

The Honduranian householder is not deeply involved in any intricate scheme of domesticity. His house is of the simplest construction—a framework of slender poles about which walls of plaited palm leaves, grass or any old choice of the thousand and one available materials growing close at hand, are interlaced, and the whole affair is then thatched with prairie hay from the swamp.

Arrived at the first summer-house, Honk knocked politely on the rubber plant, or palm-leaf fan, or whatever served for a door. An eloquent burst of silence ensued. I pushed my rotund bulk to the front and peeked in at the transom which happened to be at the bottom of the door instead of at the top.

"Nobody lives in this one," I said.

"They've evidently moved; but I see a few thousand cockroaches browsing around on the floor. Just as well spray the place while we're here, for practice."

There were six or eight of the wickiups in a nice straight row, not over ten feet apart. The thought struck me to tell Honk that maybe he'd better turn on his pressure gently, but I didn't get that far.

He opened his throttle with a mighty wrench, and whizz went the full force of the imprisoned vapor.

"Whoop! Whee!" we yelled in chorus—and the following happened, briefly:

That first summer cottage went over like a tumble weed; then, over went the next one; and down went the third, fourth, and so on. Honk had made a strike in the first frame.

The air, in about three seconds, was filled with haycocks, dust, dead insects, formaldehyde, corn-shucks and chaos. Farther along the row there were a family or two of unsuspecting natives at home, and when the wrecks of their hives came tumbling about their ears without warning, they boiled out from under, with hay in their hair, like a lot of scared rats.

A number of the women and all of the kids were in the most negligible of negligee costumes.

Honk was so much overcome by some sort of emotion—surprise, chagrin, shocked sense of propriety, or what not—that he forgot to shut off the blow-gun, but held it, spouting a stream of vapor high in the air.

The hullabaloo brought out those of our men who had remained at the barracks-shed, and these unfeeling barbarians let loose a Bray of discordant whoops that put the finishing touch of panic to the fleeing bunglowers.

Honk came to his senses with a jerk, shut off the blower, and surveyed the havoc he had wrought, dejectedly.


"Piffle!" he said. "Wouldn't that jar you, now? Did we knock over the entire block, Horace?"

"I hear the cook calling all hands to tiffin," I said irrelevantly.

Honk was busy squinting at something he saw in the distance.

"Here comes a detachment of *soldados* from town, on the run," he announced, excitedly. "Inside the shed, men. Everybody get under cover," he bawled. "War has broke out in Honduras!"

CHAPTER V
MIDST WAR'S ALARMS

 **CONTEND** that Honk should have known better in the first place. He must have been in a decidedly optimistic frame of mind when he nonchalantly directed against those stage-scenery houses a blast that would almost have uprooted a tree.

Even I—short-sighted and generally considered cheerfully lacking in mental processes though I be—would have hesitated before turning the full force—but, pardon.

The scene-shifters have already reset the stage. In vaudeville there is no time for platitudes, philosophies, or post-mortems. The audience demands a continuous performance.

But he was right; war seemed to be imminent. The shouting and excited soldiery, backed up and urged on by a noisy rabble of chattering, chocolate-colored men, fluttering females, dogs, chickens, and kids, ap-

proached riotously, deployed, ducked, spread out in skirmish fashion, and had us surrounded in a jiffy.

We counted upward of thirty in uniform, carrying guns. The *comandante*, field-marshal, coach, *el capitan*, or whatever titular embellishment he paraded under, waved a corroded piece of cutlery called a sword and jabbered a string of orders, invectives, and cockadoodle-doots.

It sounded like the wind ripping a tin roof off a barn, intermingled with a boy raking a stick along a paling-fence and fire-crackers exploding under a tub.

"*Yee p! Gr-r-r-r-honk-honk-rat-tat-tat! Choo! S-s-s-oomp! Si, si! Ee-o-mee-o! Gr-umph!*" was the best I could make of it. I have to have my Spanish served slow.

"Great!" I said, applauding. "He's impersonating a choo-choo train!"

"Lemme go out and get him," volunteered Watts. "He's too far away. We can't hear him very well."

"You boys keep still," said Honk. "I'll parley with these people. This is a case where we must use diplomacy, else we'll have 'em sore at us for all time to come. We must soothe 'em, not aggravate 'em."

"I vill a visker-broom take, and clean up the whole capoodle, yet!" offered our Teuton warrior, Schweitzmeyer. But Honk decided that it was a case for the State Department, and not the white wings, so he threw open one of the shuttered orifices that served for a window and waved a handkerchief.

The Hondurans are truly a bunch of *caballeros*. A handkerchief, a tea towel, or a counterpane, it matters not, waved from a window compels their attention instantly.

The little cockchafer with the sword stopped choo-chooing and threw out his chest. He then held up two fingers for silence, executed a flourish or two with his sword, did the "hayfoot, strawfoot," called six of his valiant staff to his side and advanced down stage to the tryst.

Honk learned his Spanish out of a book, so it isn't unusual for him to call the person he's talking to a "horse with a dirty nose" when he thinks he's saying, "This is fine growing weather—how's the folks?"

It followed, therefore, as the night follows day, that a colloquial tangle ensued immediately after he and the redoubtable Captain Jinks got to swapping idioms.

"A mee chili con carne! Nix amigo de

los Americanos stinkarinos!" exploded the linguist outside, with shoulders, eyebrows, and both hands corroborating his words.

"You're another!" said Honk warmly. "Eeny-meeny-miny-mo. *Como esta, mucho gracias, impecunious*. You listen to me a minute!"

"For why you—*Viento! Cuatro, nueve, doce casas* go down like the leaves—yes. You are arrest'. *Cada todos, yes! Por Dios!* All, we take to *lo cuartel. Si!*"

"See, yourself," said Honk. "Bugs! We kill 'em. So you can sleep like the log—sabe? Your two-for-a-nickel houses were ready to fall down, anyway. P-t-t! Arrest us, eh? *Vamos, hombrecillos!* On your way, kid; on your way, before we rush out and gobble up forty or fifty of you!"

The discussion waxed warmer from that moment. Captain Jinks thumped himself on the steam-chest a few times—to accelerate his draft, I took it—and words began to pop out of his nose and ears.

Spanish, pidgin-English, hog Latin, and a mixture of other odds and ends of language spouted forth at the rate of three hundred and fifty words per minute. It made the patter of a Gatling sound like the tick of an eight-day clock.

There was no use trying to stem any such torrent of phraseology as he sprayed forth, so Honk gave it up. He looked at his watch, wound it, borrowed a chew from me, and scratched his ear.

"All are arrest'!" shouted the verbal pin-wheel. "Come! To *la calaboza*! Enough! You surrender, *señores*? The stuff he ees all off! Yes. *Viva la republique! Viva la—*"

"Boys, cut off the vapor-tanks and start up the pneumatics," directed Honk in an aside. "I've got a curiosity to see how far I can knock that animated cuckoo-clock, out there."

Watts and two or three others hastened to do his bidding.

"Surrender, did you say?" Honk parleyed. "*Sacramento, cassava, pazazza*, no! To-morrow, maybe, or next week; but not to-day! Go chase yourself into the bay, you little, ugly coffee-pot of a man! Who wound you up, anyhow?"

"The joke ees feenish!" shrieked the captain. "We will the to charge!" He waved his rusty sword. "The last call! Hey! You come, do you not?"

"Hey, nothing!" said Honk, as he reached

for the nozzle of the riot-queller. "We do — not!"

Siss-s-s! Br-r-r-woof! went the blast of a two-mile-a-minute wind, and it was back to the wings for the gay gamboliers.

It lifted the sassy capitan and his aids de powwow clear off of the ground, and literally blew them, in a cloud of sand and a tangle of arms, legs, maledictions, and accouterments, into the faces of the rubber-neck cordon waiting in the rear.

With one accord, the voices of our sixty-nine shaggy soldiers sardonic rose in a blend of cacophonous laughter. They whooped and rolled on the 'dobe floor of the shed in an abandonment of boisterous glee.

"Wait till I go out and catch four or five more!" yelled Watts. "I'll stand 'em up in a row, so's you can give 'em another whacking good one. The cook didn't get to see that other shot, anyway."

"Let 'em think it over," said Honk. "I've an idea they'll decide to let us severely alone now. Our style of argument ought to convince 'em —"

But the enemy was still on the job.

The crackle of rifles being fired excitedly, and the spat and zip of bullets through the

shed, interrupted Honk's complaisant summing up of the situation.

"That sounds to me—" I murmured, as I flattened myself out in a slight depression in the floor—I'd had a weather eye on that depression all along.

Watts reconnoitered through a crack.

"They can't hit the shed only by accident," he said. "They shut both eyes when they shoot. Ten or twelve have just hiked for town at a dog-trot. Guess they've gone after the fire department and the mayor."

Honk had discovered a slab of sheet-iron, or boiler-plate, such as is used for a gangway between cars and freight-houses, and he stood this on edge and knelt behind it.

Whenever I saw him dodge down behind his armor, I knew that some one outside had pointed a gun in our direction. After the fusillade he'd peer over the top again. The greater part of the men had squatted behind a pile of boxes and barrels, and were about to start a game of fan-tan.

Most of them were munching sandwiches and other food they had snatched from the supper-table. The sun was getting low in the west.

"Here come your ten men back," I heard

Honk tell Watts. "And, by gravy, they've got a machine-gun with 'em, too! Sa-ay! Horace, where are you? It'll soon be twilight; but it's still light enough to see our finish!"

I arose on all fours circumspectly and crawled across to the nearest rent in the wall. They were getting ready to riddle us, all right; and it wasn't an air-gun they were going to do it with, either.

My blood began to boil at the sight. My blood has properties resembling air; it freezes, then liquefies, then boils. When it reaches the boiling point I become so buoyant that it nearly always results in my proving an alibi; and the sight of the honey-combed muzzle of that machine-gun, pointing our way, had my indicator jumping immediately.

Honk seemed a trifle pale, but he was calm. Watts was counting the enemy—"two, four, six," etc., deliberately. Several others were looking out at various cracks in the wall.

"We'll have to retreat, surrender, or get shot," Honk declared. "I wonder if we could make a sneak out the back way? To the deuce with these people!"

I led the retiring forces with my usual reckless disregard for danger. We filed out back of the ovens, and stopped to make the final dash for the palm decorations, a hundred yards distant.

Just as we stopped a detachment of the besiegers fired a volley from their rifles directly at us. Bullets spattered the walls above our heads.

"Turn, boys, turn!" I exclaimed, unconsciously using the stirring words of a great general. "We're going back!"

Several of the men stifled groans, or chuckles, or some kind of strong feeling, and we crowded back inside the shed, colliding with Honk, who was just coming out.

"Retreat is cut off on this side!" I reported. "Tear off a board, and into the thicket from the southwest corner, friends, Romans, and countrymen!"

But that point of egress was blocked also. The enemy turned a raking cross-fire through the shrubbery. Curses! Escape seemed impossible.

"If we only had a rusty bayonet and a blunderbuss or two we might charge 'em and win renown, or at least honorable mention," grieved Honk. "As it is, we're cor-

nered like rats. I guess we'll have to surrender. It's better to yield now than to run the risk of getting shot accidentally."

I took one more look through the knot-hole in the wall. The bunch in charge of the machine-gun had wheeled it to a point of vantage, set up their range-finder, and were all ready for the bombardment. The operator sat in his seat behind, and was squinting through the little peep-hole in his shield. Captain Jinks was just beginning a final wave of his sword, and —

I made a dive for my depression in the floor, clawing frenziedly to scratch it a little deeper before the storm of bullets commenced.

"Who's that sport in the white suit and Panama hat, now?" Watts asked.

"Why — why, he planted himself right in front of the pepper-box," Honk remarked. "Ah, I see who it is now. It's Addicks. He's arguing with 'em!"

I suspended sapping operations long enough to take another rubber.

Addicks was lounging negligently against the various muzzles of the destroyer, and with one elbow on the glittering barrel. He waved a smoking cigar in his disengaged

hand, and seemed to be relating some kind of an anecdote or reminiscence in his lazy, comfortable drawl.

The *comandante* gesticulated a few himself, ever and anon, and splattered Spanish argot around over the vicinity.

Addicks humped his shoulders like the natives do when they say, "Oh, well, never mind!"

Then he felt in his vest-pocket with thumb and forefinger, after which he and the captain strolled toward us, still arguing.

They came straight to the nearest window.

"Shake hands with my good *amigo, Colorado maduro, hello bello, el Capitan Ramonez of la guardacostas,*" said Addicks to Honk. "You-all seem to have certain differences of opinion betwixt you. I was asleep over there in the pulperia when I was awakened by the firing. *Señor el Capitan Ramonez* tells me we are the aggressors. *Bueno!* To save time, worry, ammunition, and undue exertion, it is proper and right that we should bow to the military authority. Is it not so? The regular rate, between gentlemen, you understand, is — *diez pesos* to *el Capitan Ramonez*, and the same

sum to be divided equally between his brave men. I would have arranged the matter myself, but I found, unfortunately, that I was short of change. You may slip the two saw-bucks to him, if you will, and all will be well. It is growing late, and supper waits."

"Sure thing!" said Honk, beaming as he disconnected a pair of ten-dollar notes from his roll, tendering the same to the now smiling and amiable captain.

"*Si, señores, muchas gracias,*" kowtowed that worthy warrior. "I hasten to withdraw my brave *soldados*. You are release from further bother, yes. *Las casas*—seex, ten—you poof! Blow him away like one hurricane—yes! *Viva la boom! boom!! Bueno! Magnifico!*"

He humped his back and spread his hands genially at the thought. It was a good joke. Yes! *Sacramento!* What unalloyed fun!

He blew us a kiss and pranced back to his devoted *compañeros*. The show was over. The rabble dispersed quickly when poked with the small ends of the rifles; the cordon of soldiers was withdrawn, and the whole barefoot, tatterdemalion crew of them disappeared up the main thoroughfare

wheeling their cannon and trailing their rifles behind them.

The tropic twilight descended like a gauze drop, covering the change of stage-setting from glaring day to glorious night. A cockatoo swept along, flying low, with sluggish wing-beats, to his sleeping-perch in the conservatory near by. The thicket seemed strangely silent.

Exit red fire and kettle-drums.

War and martial ardor quicken the pulse, bring sparkles to the eye and hot flushes to the cheeks, and all that sort of thing, to say nothing of cold chills along the spinal columns of some and tremblings at the knees of others.

War and so forth is great on the Fourth of July, and in moving pictures and school histories. It's most inspiring. Hurrah for war!

But a steady diet of bullets would soon ruin my digestion, I'm convinced. The spiteful zip of those small leaden messengers takes away my appetite, and I know of no pastime that I'd tire of more quickly than to have some utter stranger whom I'd never seen before gouging at me with a rusty, blood-spattered bayonet or the sharp point of a sanguinary sword!

I wouldn't stand for it, that's all.

It's so ill bred and discourteous and impolite, too. Actually vulgar! Think of rushing pell-mell into a crowd of men; braining this one, shooting that one through the thorax with a large, mauve-colored minie ball, ripping a third up the front with a saber with a horrible squashing sound, and then hacking, whacking, prodding, and swatting at the rest of 'em mercilessly and indiscriminately.

Can you imagine anything ruder or more ungentlemanly? Why, the practice is positively —

"That was pretty nervy of you, leaning up against the business end of their machine-gun like you did," said Honk to Ad-dicks admiringly. "The confounded thing might have gone off accidentally, you know."

"Ye-eh," drawled the hero, with a bored air. "But I reckon there wasn't much danger. Most anybody could have done the same thing. That machine-gun is the big bluff they put up when they want to make a showing before strangers. It wasn't loaded. They've never had a round of ammunition for it since it was captured from the revolutionists four years ago."

CHAPTER VI

SOME STIRRING TO AND FRO



WITHIN less than a week after we came to Santa Maria, that makeshift village had begun to take on a new lease of life.

Its weed-choked environs were scenes of activity and industry; the swish of scythes, the clank of hammers, and the clatter and bang of construction kept the welkin working overtime.

The place took on the semblance of a boom town in the Cherokee Strip. One of the first things we did was to set up a saw-mill, a cement-block works, and start two or three brick-kilns to going. Santa Maria hummed like a beehive on coronation day.

As soon as new building material was available, we razed all of the old, rat-undermined, run-down shacks on the company's premises, and erected new, modern, substantial warehouses, workshops, and sheds for supplies, with concrete floors and roofs that the birds wouldn't carry away to use for building nests.

Three weeks after our arrival, when the Belle of the South returned on her second trip, we had repaired the rotten docks, had clean, spacious sheds for the reception of the cargo of cement, machinery, and steel rails, and were champing the bits of impatience to get started on the ice factory and electric plant.

Meanwhile, we got acquainted with the municipal government, also the state and national government; likewise the representative citizens, both native and imported, of our adopted country.

The little mud-daubers weren't so bad, after all, if you made allowances for their race, instincts, and raising. They got together, and voted to furnish sites for the poles, and to allow us to install an electric street-lighting system in Santa Maria, free of all duty or tax, and even went so far as to tell Honk that whenever he wanted to put down a concrete sidewalk or pave a street (at the expense of the H. T. P. Company), to go ahead without the formality of a government permit.

There was nothing narrow or hidebound about the Santa Maria *ciudadanos*. As a result of this open-door policy, and our con-

sequent freedom from the usual red tape and petty municipal supervision and surveillance, we soon had the electric power-plant and ice manufactory well under way and growing like broilers in a colony coop or mushrooms in a prospectus.

Nor did we neglect the railroad terminals while other work was being pushed.

A track was laid from the wharves across to the site for the railroad yards, and one of the little second-hand locomotives was set up. Thereafter, whenever we felt low-spirited or nostalgic, we'd have McMuir, the engineer, to run back and forth and toot his whistle to make us feel at home.

The whine of wheel-flanges and the sizzle of live steam are very soothing and restful when the chatter of monkeys and the cackle of parrots begins to get on a fellow's nerves. We had built, also, a two-story brick and cut-stone bungalow, to be used temporarily as a headquarters office and living apartments; later, it was destined to be the passenger station, with ticket-offices, waiting-rooms, and lunch-counters on the first floor, just like civilization.

Addicks moved his traps into the bungalow, where he had a species of an office, at

which he rarely could be found. When wanted, we generally looked for Addicks at either one of two places—the *pulperia*, two squares distant, or in a hammock under a crooked orange-tree in the side yard.

One thing must be mentioned in connection with the bungalow; it had floors of mahogany, ebony, and rosewood, and walls inlaid and paneled and grilled and stuccoed with rare woods—just for the asking.

The forest just across the creek was full of piano timber and Looey the Umpteenth furniture in the rough. All we had to do was whistle for a gang and two or three mule-teams, select our trees, and set the men to work. The sawmill, the drying kilns, and the carpenters and finishers did the rest. That bungalow was one of the sights of the city.

During an idle moment while strolling along the shore, Honk and I conceived the plan for Santa Maria's splendid esplanade encircling the bay.

Its construction was so easy it was really absurd. We obtained permission to clear out a few clumps of underbrush and trees, smoothed the sand into a roadway, set ornamental poles where needed, strung wires,

installed arc-lights, and lo!—to the headland on either side ran a palm-bordered paseo and parkway that was a Riverside Drive, Riviera, and Redondo Beach rolled into one.

When lighted up at night, the esplanade, with its palms and flowers on one side and the lapping purple and gold sea on the other, was just about what the artist dreamed before his pipe went out.

Speaking of art reminds me of Bilbro.

A tall, medium-sized, squatty man of uncertain age and brownish-green eyes. He unloaded various cameras and ammunition for the same from a passing steamer, and snapshotted around for a week or eight days taking panoramas of everything in sight.

He and Addicks met socially at the rest-room across from the Plaza, and became quite crony. Bilbro made photographic plates showing the H. T. P. Company's new buildings, the wharfs, the little train with the men posed all over it, and the right of way to the edge of the jungle, from a hundred different view-points.

He made pictures of our shaggy henchmen wielding picks, shovels, and scythes, in moments of repose, at play; of Honk and

me, in our working clothes, dressed up, in swimming in the bay; of Addicks, asleep and awake; of dogs, flowers, bunches of bananas, orange, mahogany, rubber, and a hundred other kinds of trees; of parrots, baboons, Captain Toomey, the *guardacostas*, the Carib roustabouts—everything.

And then he caught the next tramp freighter that put in at Santa Maria, and we saw him no more.

If you can think of a camera fiend engaged madly in the pursuit of art for art's sake, with sandy blue hair, and who failed to return a dollar he borrowed from me before leaving; his name is Bilbro.

The preliminary work at the coast end of the railway which was yet to be built was pretty well completed. Everything was in order. We were ready to push the construction of the line.

Said Honk, as we looked over the progress made and saw that it was good:

"Let's see. Saturday, Sunday, and the next day's Monday—we'll start the big ball to rolling on Monday. Building this railroad will be like getting money from home. With the gang of boys we have here, we'll lay track right ahead of the en-

gine. We'll give these *mañana*-fanciers down here a glimpse of twentieth-century, Anglo-Saxon get-up, eh, Horace? I'm anxious to get the job finished and off our hands. I'm planning to spend Thanksgiving with my sister, Clara, in St. Paul. We'll take four or five of the boys and set the grade-stakes next week — ”

The appearance of Addicks, tentatively puffing at a cigarette and holding an official-looking letter in his hand, caused a break in Honk's rhapsody. He passed the letter to Honk without comment. My confrere proceeded to inspect the missive, also without palaver or preliminary remark. He broke the silence soon.

“Wha-what's this?” he exclaimed, peering at the sheet of paper in his hand. “Orders to discontinue all work until further notice? Everything to stop? And over Stringfellow's signature, too. I'd like to have somebody please explain this to me. I don't understand no such a letter, nohow!”

“I thought the confounded rummies wanted — Say; Does that mean our pay is stopped? Are we canned?” This outburst was from me.

Addicks smiled a quiet, knowing smile, and then spoke without emotion.

"Take it easy, *compañeros*," he said. "I believe I can explain the matter satisfactorily. You gentlemen are in no danger of losing your present positions, I assure you. The fact is, the company is very well pleased with your work. You have accomplished a great deal here. I am profoundly impressed by the showing you've made myself. I think you've earned a temporary relaxation. That's what that letter means—no more, no less. In strictest confidence, I'll tell you that this is a business move."

He winked languidly, and continued:

"They've unloaded a few sheaves of stock at par, we'll say. The work stops, the stock drops. They buy it back when it touches bottom. *Bueno!* The work is resumed. All is well. Merely business."

"I see," said Honk grimly. "A gang of cutthroats. And while they're engaged in fleecing one another, we're supposed to lie low and do nothing. Hum! I can't say that I'm stuck on such methods."

"Oh, fudge!" said I. "Forget it! If our pay goes on, why be grouchy. I rather fancy the idea, don't you know. Did anybody mention refreshments?"

This was a subject that never grew tiresome to Addicks. He led the way.

"It's ours not to reason why; ours not to make reply," he paraphrased presently. "*Bebo á la salud, señores!* It is a pleasant world we live in—provided we follow the line of least resistance. Manuel Lopez tells me that a shark swam in the bay last evening."

With a little practice, I believe I could learn to be a lotus-eater with the best of them. But Honk is different; he'd never acquire the habit, not in a thousand years. Nothing irritates him so much as inaction. He can't sit still.

So, when we had nothing to do but rest and muse on the blessings and benefits vouchsafed by a benign Providence, Honk must needs bestir himself, and get ready for an inspection trip into the interior, along the very indistinct and vaguely marked route of the proposed railroad.

And, not content with tearing himself away from the comforts and conveniences of civilized life at the moment when we'd got things in some sort of shape, nothing else would satisfy his penchant for trouble but that I should straddle a lop-eared mule and trapse along with him.

I told him I had my books to post up,

and all my multitudinous array of official duties to attend to, such as—well, I hadn't receipted Captain Toomey for the last ten thousand barrels of cement brought in by the Belle of the South, and, no doubt, I could find other unfinished business—

"Come with me, my boy," he urged. "We'll wander under the waving fronds of the royal palms, and study the marvelous beauties of this fairyland around us at close range. Why, Addicks tells me that there are monkeys, and a thousand and one interesting forms of life—birds of wondrous beauty, and butterflies, and flowers beyond the wildest imagination—besides, I wish to size up the outlook for hardwoods and rubber-trees, and indigo-bushes, and such like—and to set a few stakes by the way.

"We will stop nights with natives; we'll study them, too, as we find opportunities from time to time. We're empire builders, Horace. Come, gird on your good frog-sticker, and let us go!"

"Oh, very well," I said—for I knew he'd harp on it till I consented to go—"all right. Where's your noble steeds? And we'll need a pack-mule to carry the camp-kit and supplies—grub, you know—bacon, cornmeal, sugar, salt, coffee—"

Some Stirring To and Fro 97

"Hear the man!" Honk said, addressing a pile of blue-prints and an ink-well. "He thinks we're about to start on an overland trip to Peru! No, we won't require any elaborate outfit, Horace. You might slip a sack of sandwiches in your pocket to nibble on if we should happen to get hungry between meals—and be sure to fetch plenty of chewing. I'll take my revolver, in case we should run across some particularly gorgeous bird we might want to have stuffed. Leave the eating and sleeping arrangements all to me. I speak Spanish very fluently."

"You do," I chuckled. "About as fluently as an Eskimo. How long are we to be gone on this *safari*?" I asked.

"A couple or three days," he replied.

We saw Addicks as we jogged past the *pulperia* nearest his place of repose. He waved a languid flipper, and hoped we'd have a pleasant journey. He also asked what low-down, good-for-nothing we'd secured to act as guide and chaperon to the expedition. Honk pooh-poohed, and said we expected to manage without one.

"What would we want with a guide?" he marveled. "North is north—and the opposite direction is south. The H. T. P.

Company's right-of-way extends in a westerly direction from here; what more do you want? I've an idea I could run lines and plat this whole forty-eight-cent little country into town lots in a week. Guide? P-t-t!"

We spurred forward, and blithesomely penetrated the waving, rustling jungle. To lay aside the mask of forced frivolity behind which we hide our morbid fears and sorrows, and to speak out freely as a poet, or somebody without thought for the future, it is a pleasure to state that a Central American forest is a thing comical, fearsome, weird, marvelous, and terrible.

Take the contents of all the greenhouses in the world, jumble 'em, throw away the pots, add California, season with a few sprigs of Mississippi cane-brake and a slice or two of Arkansas cypress-swamp, add the Everglades, break a thousand zoos and birderies, and shake well together; place in a slow oven and bake—or better, parboil steadily until overdone. Or—

Smoke an Egyptian cigarette (100 proof), nibble a hashish pill, quaff two absinths, a Kansas cocktail, and top off with hot Scotches, say four, hurriedly; then, sliding over the side of your bunk, with the poppy

blossoms nodding—swaying—you are off for a trip with the Jabberwock of Wooze.

And what you see, old tourist, might be likened, in a hollow, papier-mâché way, to a jungle in Central America with its birds, bugs and beasties, greenness and grandeur.

Monkeys swing, hand over hand, up the creepers, or tumble, chittering, heels over head from tree-branch to tangled thicket; the air is aquiver with chirps, squawks, twitters, rustlings, and buzzings; on yonder inverted feather-duster a yellow-billed blackbird, with a rose comb and a peacock's tail, ruffles its green ruff, and shrieks harsh calumnies at a purple woodpecker with an orange pompon and red and white tassels on its ears.


It is a world gone mad with colors.

"Shoot me that white bat with the blue mane and the ears of an Irish setter," I said to Honk. "I want it for evidence."

He aimed carefully, and fired.

CHAPTER VII

LOST IN THE JUNGLE

 COVEY of parrots flew, screaming; a snake fell out of a palm with a thump; three thousand monkeys swung down on the flying roots of a tree that had sprouted wrong end up; a giant frog, seated in a tuft of palm-leaf fans, ki-yied like a terrier pup.

We clucked to the mules and went on. After some hours I began to enjoy the pageant in my sober way. It was all very interesting to a layman. Honk expressed himself as being much pleased with the exhibit; he said that if anybody had told him such a delirium tremens lot of natural phenomena existed anywhere in the western hemisphere, he'd have cherished doubts.

As it was, two eyes were inadequate to see it all; one should have a hundred, like a spider or a potato.

In the meantime we kept riding on and on, in a haphazard, zigzag fashion; we

weren't following any trail or path; wherever we found a way to worm through, at a point where the grass and brier-bushes were



"Every few minutes we'd stop and scrape from each other an outer coating of ticks, ants, centipedes, and woolly worms."

not wholly impassable, we did so; every few minutes we'd stop and scrape from each

other an outer coating of ticks, ants, centipedes, and woolly worms.

I kept dismissing as childish a frequently recurring wish that I hadn't come. After six hours of this wonderful wandering we came to a tumbling streamlet in a bosky dell. Honk spied a growth of large, peculiar trees on the far side, which he said were either ebony, mahogany, or rubber.

I made no issue of it, but he dismounted and crossed on a fallen tree that spanned the creek some twenty feet in the air. He urged me to follow, but I refused; I can be firm when I set my head. I tarried, therefore, with the other mules.

Half an hour afterward I hallooed.

An hour later I thought I'd venture across, via the foot-log, and look around for my companion. I tethered the mules to a swinging root and proceeded warily to execute this maneuver.

Two hours subsequently I found that the north had shifted to the west, that the sun was just sinking in the east, and that there were wildcats in the woods—maybe lions and tigers, too, for all I knew!

Of the wildcats I was certain. I saw one, and it spat at me. Heyday! Lost in

the delirium tremens wood, and night at hand! A nice mess—yes!

I had no compass, no gun, no— Oh, yes; beg pardon! I had a sack of sandwiches. So I stopped in an open space about a foot square, under a coconut-tree, and ate a sandwich. After that I considered the situation and found that there was nothing else to do—absolutely nothing—where-upon I ate another sandwich.

Just then a pistol-shot banged and roared not over twelve feet away. I reconnoitered. It was Honk, lost, traveling in a circle, and—it appeared that our circles had almost crossed each other, if such a mathematical entanglement be possible in this latitude.

“Well,” I growled, “what are you shooting at now?”

“Horace!” he cried joyfully. “My dear fellow! Why didn’t you whistle? I must’ve missed the path! Which way are the mules?”

“The world is mine!” I said. “All directions look alike to me. Help yourself. North, east, south, west! *Carrambos!*”

“But the mules!” he insisted, refusing to be beguiled from the previous question by my insouciant air. “I’m asking you where are the mules?”

I pointed upward and peered toward the right and the left; I stooped and sighted carefully between two cloud-scraping trees; I patted my pockets—and not a hair or a hoof of the aforesaid mules could I produce.

But I resurrected one lone remaining sandwich, which I offered him instead. He accepted it and devoured it greedily in two bites.

"Wouldn't mind taking a couple more, if you have 'em handy," he said hungrily.

"There are no more," I told him.

"Well, let's not stand here like a pair of dummies!" he snapped. "Night is coming on. We can't sleep out in these woods—"

"Oh! Can't we?" I heaved a sigh of relief. "Gee, that's good news! I had a sneaking idea somehow that we could. But if not, bully! I'm ready to go in whenever you are." I bowed low, in my courtliest manner. "After you," I said.

"The question before the house," said Honk, "is, by thunder, which is the most direct route to the nearest inn or farmhouse, where we may obtain refreshment and sleeping accommodations for the night? Do you hear hens cackling or dogs baying deep-mouthed welcome anywhere?"

"I do not," I confessed. "But that doesn't happen to be any of my concern, anyhow. If I remember rightly, the eating and sleeping arrangements were to be left wholly to you. You speak Spanish very fluently, I believe. *Beano! Piano!* I wash my hands of the entire business."

"Huh!" he grunted. "Wash your face, too, while you're at it. It needs it."

He took the direction of the breeze by wetting his finger and holding it up; tried to find the north star, or the Southern Cross, failed; and then we set out, by guess.

I suggested that his pocket-compass would bring us to the coast some time, if brought into practical service. He searched all of his pockets and found that he had lost it, of course. From his looks of suspicion, he must have half believed that I'd stolen it.

As we hadn't the remotest idea in which direction the mules were, we dismissed them from our scheme of reaching a haven.

Honk's plan was quite simple; almost idiotic, in some respects.

"If we keep on going—that is, moving forward—calmly and without losing our wits, we may presently discover a trail or a

human habitation of some kind. The essential thing," he admonished me very carefully, "is to preserve a cool, unruffled demeanor, no matter what happens. Never get rattled, Horace, my— Wow! Help! Help! Run for your life!"

"What is it?" I asked in some excitement.

"Stepped on a snake as big as a fire-hose!" His voice shook with calmness.

"Then it's me for the top of a tall tree!" I declared emphatically.

"Snakes climb trees like squirrels. We must clear away a space in the grass and start a fire. Wild animals are afraid of fire. The sooner we get a roaring fire going, the better off we'll be in these wilds."

It wasn't easy to build a fire. Every other weed, vine, or creeper we touched was a stickery one—even the blades of grass had sharp edges—and the green vegetation caught fire about as readily as a rubber boot.

It was no joking matter at the time, with an anaconda due to throw a half-hitch around one or both of us at any minute!

We didn't build much of a fire; but we made a smudge that was a triumph. The

smoke rolled and swirled in every direction, obscuring the stars above, and came very nearly suffocating us in the bargain. These orgies occupied us until long after bedtime.

I proposed to Honk that we divide our forces into shifts or dog-watches of two hours each, during which one of us would sleep while the other stood guard and kept the insects, vampires, and this, that, and the other from devouring the whole outfit bodily.

Honk was agreeable. He offered to stand the first watch himself. Now, I might have made an issue of it, and held out for that first two hours' vigil as a right, because I had suggested the plan in the first place—and while we were thrashing it out daylight would have come—so, to demonstrate that I was a good fellow to be out camping with, I let him have his way. Besides, I was sleepy.

Some hours later I awoke with a sudden start. A centipede or an iguana or something was busily engaged in biting a series of notches in my left ear, and a large, goggle-eyed pinching-bug was regarding me calculatingly from a grass-stem by which he had let himself down.

A harsh, rasping, sputtering noise near by engaged my attention. It was Honk—
asleep at the switch, as usual. I had awakened just in time.

An investigating committee of gargoyle-faced monkeys was even then about to make an example of us.

The shadowy shape of one hoary-haired old rascal was discernible just behind Honk's defenseless head, where the creature had but to stretch forth one of his three or four hands to gouge out an eye or otherwise mar my comrade's manly beauty irreparably.

I groped quietly for something to throw at the marauders. Nothing came to my hand except the moist and plastic soil on which we lay. I worked a handful of the same into a ball, which I lost no time in hurling at the monkey behind Honk.

Immediately afterward Honk sat up, with a wild yell, clawing the dirt from his eyes and mouth and glaring about him for his assailant. My shot had ricocheted on his visage.

"Who hit me?" he bellowed in a voice that scattered the covey of monkeys like chaff.

I rose up, feigning a great show of yawn-

ing and wonderment, and he promptly poured a frightful tale of assault in my ears. He said he was letting me sleep a little while beyond the time agreed upon between us, because I looked fagged out, and he hadn't the heart to disturb me; that he was sitting, comfortably smoking a cigarette and making plans for our future, when an enormous ape appeared from behind a clump of plaintain and without the least provocation swatted him in the face with a chunk of mud as big as a football.

As a resourceful, extemporaneous—well, call it nature-faker, if you like—I've had a high regard for Honk's proficiency since that occasion.

"An ape as tall as a man," he declaimed graphically, "with a large, flat-nosed, evil, grinning face and hairy, muscular arms like a ball-player! The rascal carried a knotty cudgel in his left hand, and—and—"

"A lantern, and an extra tire around his neck, and wore tan shoes and a nose-ring," I suggested. "But don't tell me he had on a silk hat, for I won't believe you," I said decidedly.

Honk looked surprised and hurt, but he held his peace.

Neither of us attempted to sleep again. Dawn came at length, and I wasn't sorry, for the chorus of chirpings, hissings, yowls, squeals, screams, rattlings, and clickings was beginning to get on my nerves.

I noticed that the sun rose in the northwest. I've read, and even heard people say outright, that nobody need to go hungry in a tropical forest. The impression seems to prevail that all you've got to do is to reach out your hand, help yourself to the buttered buns on a breadfruit-tree, pluck a few bunches of bananas, a hatful of oranges, figs, grapefruit, plantains, pineapples, coconuts, dates, mangoes, pomegranates, et cetera, eat heartily, and wash down the repast with coffee, cocoa, or lemonade, to suit the taste. Everything obtained fresh from the bushes.

All this is more or less of a bunk.

Wild oranges, et al., are unfit for food, if there were any. Coconuts, figs, plantains, and that sort of thing are usually green, and are either secreted among the leaves where you can't find 'em or else they grow at the tiptop of a tall tree or plant that to climb would make even a monkey dizzy.

No, it isn't all easy picking. There are a

lot of edible-looking fruits, nuts, and berries hanging within reach, but how are you going to tell which is nutritious and which is deadly poison?

The really nourishing and palatable tropical fruits grow in orchards and truck-patches, not in the jungle. So, we decided to forego breakfast.

"We'd better strike in an easterly direction," said Honk. "We'll make a bee-line for town. Once there, we can send a native boy out after the mules. This will be a fine experience for us, Horace. Gives us a lot of practical knowledge of the topography and indigenous plant and animal life of the country; knowledge we might never acquire otherwise."

"Sure," I assented. "But my stomach is beginning to mutter uncomplimentary things about all this topography and indigenous plant-life business, and at the same time nothing to eat."

Honk led the way. I brought up the rear — or as much of it as I could drag, consisting of grass-stems, brambles, and burry twigs that refused to let go of my legs. We resumed the usual routine of pausing every twelve or fifteen feet to unload a bushel or

two of deadhead insects that had clambered aboard for a free ride.

For creatures born and brought up in the woods, those insects had a surprising taste for traveling; they were ready, and even anxious, to embark on a globe-trot at a moment's notice, leaving friends, kindred, and old, familiar stamping-grounds without so much as a backward glance.

Still we kept on.

The jungle seemed to get denser, darker, and more tangled as we progressed. A moist, odoriferous, hot steam permeated the air. It smelled of wet leaves and overripe tomatoes and sour apple-pulp and rotting alfalfa, mixed—a kind of clammy, dank, moldy smell like a Kansas City grocery-store after the Kaw River has stood six feet deep in it for a week or ten days.

We happened upon a little spring of cold, crystal water bubbling up from under a snaky-looking embankment of ferns and moss. After sampling a couple of quarts apiece from it we resumed our journey, heartened and refreshed. We must have accomplished a mile an hour during the next three hours' hike.

Honk looked at his watch.



"At the fourteenth shot one fell."

"Just noon," he announced.

"I'll tell you what," I proposed. "Shoot a parrot, and we'll build a fire and cook him. A parrot ought to be good eating, if he isn't too old."

Honk selected a tree full of the brilliant-hued birds and banged away. Down tumbled a small monkey, shot neatly through the coco—by accident. The bird contingent flew, shrieking and squawking, in all directions.

"Cook the monk," said Honk in disgust.

I'll admit that I picked the animal up and felt of his wish-bone. I even started to open my pocketknife—but, no! I remembered that the month had no "R" in it. And, with all my shortcomings—heretic, skeptic, or lunatic, or whatever my politics may be—I'm no cannibal. There was a vague facial resemblance between that monkey and a boy I used to go to school with. I couldn't do it.

"Let me try a shot at that coconut-tree yonder," I said. "And keep your eye peeled. If one drops, watch where it lights."

At the fourteenth shot one fell.

Honk marked the spot and plunged into the thicket after it. He returned trium-

phant. It was only about two-thirds green, by some freak of fortune. We cracked it with the revolver-butt, gobbled it down greedily, and resumed our march. We must have deviated from the course somewhat—I'm convinced that we did when I mentally review that toilsome trek.

If we had traveled in the bee-line we set out to follow, by four-thirty we'd ought to have been somewhere in the middle of the Caribbean Sea, south of the island of Jamaica.

I mentioned that it was a great deal farther coming back than it was going to. Honk ascribed this phenomenon to various causes. He called my attention to the density of the screen of foliage which obscured the sun, and thereby caused us to wander at random about two hours and forty-nine minutes out of every three hours; also to thickets, frequently encountered, which baffled our most impassioned efforts to penetrate them; all of which consumed a lot of our valuable time.

"Well," I grumbled when five o'clock came and found us still wandering, "what d'you think I am? A Boy Scout, an African explorer, or what? D'you think I'm

enjoying this? I've got a brier in each heel! How much—"

"That's right!" he snorted. "Go on! Blame it all on me, you beefer! Am I lolling in a palanquin while you're undergoing all these hardships? Look at my torn and bitten hands! And if you can put your finger on a spot from my ears to my toes where there isn't an outlandish insect of some kind busy working on my hide, I'll give you a dollar! You take the lead a while if you're dissatisfied!"

"Don't get excited," I said. "We must keep calm, whatever happens. I'm quite satisfied with your work. With the exception of every now and then letting a tree-limb fly back and wallop me across the face, you do very well. But I'm due at the supper-table this minute, that's what I mean!"

"Huh!" he returned. "What do I—Sa-ay! Is that a bunch of bananas I see there in that clump of exaggerated corn, canebrake, cauliflower, and Canada thistle mixed, or do my eagle eyes deceive me?"

"Glory be!" I shouted. "A bunch of bananas, or I'm a Hittite! Ripe ones, too! Saved, by a twist of the wrist!"

Honk shinned up a creeper that depend-

ed from a near-by tree, and I swung him within reach of the fruit. He sawed the cluster of red dainties from their fastenings with his pocket-machete. The rest was but a matter of hand-to-mouth movements continued until the storage-bins were stuffed, although the demand still remained steady to strong. We were gorged, but still hungry—a state of affairs you may have noticed some time when taste tried a set-to with capacity.

But to annihilate an entire bunch of bananas at one sitting was too much of a good thing, however much we might have rejoiced in its accomplishment. The best we could do fell short of the whole by forty or fifty pounds. Nevertheless, we carried along with us what was left, lugging the load by turns.

The day waned, and the end of our journey was like the end of Pat's rope—somebody had misplaced it. Another nightmare of darkness in the jungle stared us in the face.

Honk fell to mumbling dark, gritty curses in an ominous growl as he stumbled along over roots and interlaced vines, or breasted the rolling sea of tangled grass. His state of mind seemed so baleful that I withheld

my habitual flow of snappy comment and facetious raillery.

It was dangerous to bait him. He was in the mood of the bear that has run all day with the pack yapping at his heels. He had begun to wag his head sidewise and look for a tree to get to his back.

The climax came in the gathering gloom when he stepped in a morass of mud and water, half knee-deep. But he was not original. I readily recognized several of Captain Toomey's choicest expletives, almost word for word.

"Now, what are we going to do?" he bawled. "We've reached the limit!"

Whiz! Bang! Zip! with kettledrum accompaniment, please.

"I'll have the bugler sound the retreat if you insist, general," I said. "Why don't you come up here where it's dry, before an alligator bites you?"

At the mention of alligators he came stepping. Honk wasn't as much of a faunist, quite, as he was a florist.

Yet an alligator is a shy, timorous creature. There are people who would rather have, by far, an alligator for a pet than a canary. Others prefer hedgehogs, Gila monsters, or rattlesnakes; it's all a matter

of preferment, as the man said who lived in a sewer.

"Now what the—what are we going to do?" Honk asked again.

"Listen!" I said warningly, for I had caught the faintest, fragmentary hint of a sound borne on the breath of the vagrant breeze that sighed in the thickets. The breeze freshened. This time the sound came clearly defined—'t was a sound as familiar as the toll of bells on a Sunday morning, or the clang of a trolley-car gong.

It seemed elusive and remote and out of place in that wild and woolly woods—we couldn't exactly reconcile the thing to our surroundings—but there was no mistaking it. It was the voice of an old friend—a phonograph—and it was playing "Sammy."

"What does it sound like to you?" Honk wheezed in an awed whisper.

"Sammy, when you come wooing,
There's something doing
Around my heart."

I hummed in my mellow barytone, *allegretto crescendo*. "Why, it's a phonograph," I said; "but there may be a spook operating it, for all we know."

"Not on your spectrum!" he cried ec-

statically. "It's a real, live, sure-enough human person that's running that machine. It had me guessing for a minute, though. I didn't know but what I had gone nutty without warning. But you heard the same thing I did, so it must be all right. Whip up, Horace. We must locate the place it's coming from before the record runs out. It may be the last one the guy will play."

Our half-eaten store of bananas, forgotten and discarded, we left where Honk dropped them. In the swiftly deepening shadows of evening, with ears cocked in strained attention, breathlessly silent but moving swiftly like two jungle-cats, stalking their prey, we turned our backs on snaky Medusa writhing in her morass and tiptoed hand in hand toward Euterpe warbling mellifluously beneath the stars!

Straight as the collie runs to the bleat of the lost sheep, the cow to her calf, or a pig to the clatter of a falling acorn, we made our way unerringly to the wicker bungalow from whence poured that strain of palpitant melody. Trailing a sound in the jungle is no cinch, but we did it.

We had to do it. We were like the burro that climbed a tree.

CHAPTER VIII

A BLASTED LIFE



IT was one of those impromptu habitations of mankind, such as seem to be the rule that proves the exception in Honduras, built of sticks interwoven with ferns and rushes, and roofed with the broad-bladed grass of the valley. One novel characteristic it had, inasmuch as it consisted of two rooms — most of them have but one.

We had apparently run across a mansion. A two-roomed house and a phonograph betokened little less than a country magnate of high degree.

Through the open apertures which served for window and door, the yellow light from a kerosene lamp shone cheerily. We approached without hesitation. At the moment when we were about to announce ourselves, the music stopped.

El señor, the director of the concert, was changing the records. The usual scratching prelude followed, and then there burst

forth the sprightly air of "There's a Big Cry-Baby in the Moon!"

We saw the instigator of it all, as he seated himself at his library table, where he was ostensibly engaged in some nefarious work which had to do with books, letter-files, pill-boxes, and what looked like watchmaking tools.

The man himself was a stubby built person, with a brown beard trimmed to a point, and a shock of tousled hair. He was dressed in wrinkled khaki. I wasn't absolutely certain on such short notice, but he looked like either a Mexican or a Dutchman or maybe an Austrian from Switzerland. We halted in the open doorway and coughed.

The rural grandee, filibuster, revolutionist, or whatever he might be, looked up and displayed a mild sort of nearsighted interest in us.

He arose, sidled circumspectly to the beyond side of the table, throttled the phonograph and favored us with his open-eyed regard. And as to that, I've no doubt that we did look a bit mussed and wild and woolly to pop up in a man's doorway unheralded after nightfall. He was appar-

ently prepared for either a fight or a foot-race.

"*Beanus deuce, Sinner!*" Honk said affably, in his best Castellano claro.

"*Muy bien,*" promptly returned the other. "*Y ustedese? Bien venido,*" he continued, bowing. "*Me allegro mucho de ver.*"

It was plain to be seen that we had bumped up against an old-timer with the Spanish idioms and syntaxes.

Honk took the count before the man had hardly commenced. He looked at me appealingly.

"Search me," said I. "Sounds to me like what first comes out of a bottle of seltzer. But maybe he can parley-voo United States. I'll ask him."

I crowded myself to the front.

"*Sprechen sie English?*" I asked, wiggling my fingers and rolling my eyes. "*Americano? Alle samee Chicago, New York, George Washington, Teddy Roosevelt?*"

The man came from behind the table.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," he said. "Visitors are few and far between in this part of the country. You took me by surprise. Have seats. I'll call my *muchacho*

and have him bring food and drink, and to take care of your animals—I presume you left them at the trail?”

“No, we came on foot,” Honk explained. “We’ve been prowling around in the jungle for a couple of days—those two days seem like a week, however”—and he went on to state a few facts as to our names, business, and general unimportance, while the table was being cleared away for the meal.

Our host said his name was Tuttle—Edgebert Tuttle. He was neither greaser, dago, nor French as I had first classified him. He was a native of Ohio, born and bred in the city of Cleveland. I was really somewhat chagrined to think that I had thought him a foreigner. His business down there in the jungle, he said, was that of an entomologist, or, in plain parlance, a bug-hunter.

The boy, Esteban, brought tortillas, beans, and coffee; also aguardiente and water, with glasses. We drank, but we were not voraciously hungry, having already eaten half a bunch of bananas.

“If you will permit me, professor,” Honk remarked, “I should say that you sure hit bugdom when you landed here.”

Our host did not respond readily to the implied lightness or flippancy in Honk's tone. His mind seemed more on the plodding order. I set him down as having a serious view of life, and more or less proof against a rapid-fire of quip or persiflage.

I was sure of it when he replied with a sort of ponderous gravity:

"Ah, yes. Quite true. I find many highly interesting varieties of coleoptera, homoptera, and lepidoptera in this neighborhood. I have secured twenty specimens of the *curculio imperialis* within a stone's throw of this spot. This is considerable of an achievement, when you realize that —"

"Horace and I are both mangy with bugs," said Honk. "We're covered with 'em. All kinds. If you've got an extra shirt and a pair of overalls, I'll present you with my clothes. You might find several new varieties in them."

"That would be unlikely, I'm afraid. I am familiar with the various species hereabouts, and it is hardly probable that you have any but the commoner kinds of wingless pupipara, sub-order of diptera, commonly called ticks, lice, and so forth.

"Some authorities classify the flea with

this order, but I differ with them, for this reason, if no other. In the *pulex irritans*, or ordinary flea, we find a singular construction of the mouth—unique, in fact—consisting of a pair of sword-shaped, finely serrated mandibles which, together with a sharp, needle-like organ, presumably the labrum, constitutes —”

At this point, Honk made pantomimic signs to me, intending no doubt to convey that the man was mildly infested in his attic. When I got my mind concentrated again, our friend Tuttle had finished what he'd been saying. I am in utter ignorance to this day concerning the physical peculiarities of that flea.

“Two years I've been here,” urbanely continued our host. “It is a great work. I have already made many valuable additions to scientific knowledge on the subject of entomology. I've secured a number of rare specimens which I have sold to good advantage. The money thus obtained enables me to pursue my investigations undisturbed.

“It is very serene and quiet here. My *muchacho* and I are quite isolated. We see very few of our kind, which is a state

of affairs highly to be desired. The ways of men are devious and frequently unrighteous, and of women — bah! Deceivers all!”

Honk elevated his eyebrows in some astonishment. A misogynist, eh?

“Beg pardon?” he said.

“I stated that women are deceivers all!” repeated Tuttle hotly. “They are as cunning as serpents and as unscrupulous as the evil one himself. I despise the sex, sir!” He seemed quite worked up about it.

“If it will not offend you,” said I, “and if the topic be not too painful, I for one would like to hear more about it. I’m very much interested.”

Our host bowed his acknowledgments and bit like a catfish. He passed the cigars, and recounted the whole thriller, from the frontispiece to the advertisement of four other popular new books by the same author, inserted as an afterthought, on the back fly-leaf.

“I went in for the study of law, after graduating at the C. U., class of ’91,” he began, “and I was making rapid progress, if I do say it, until a woman wrecked my career.

“My family, both on the Tuttle side and

that of my mother, the Beddoes, were among the oldest and most aristocratic people of our State. Naturally, I was peculiarly fitted for a brilliant career in whatever field I might have chosen. After deliberation on the subject, I chose the law and entered the office of Segrist, Miller & Phillips."

I began to wonder if I hadn't started something tiresome when he got that far. His style was far from breezy, I had to admit.

"I met the daughter of Allen Segrist not long after I began my studies in her father's law-office, and, gentlemen, she was fair to look upon. But like many another has done before me, I fell in worship before a creature without a heart. She was utterly selfish and deceitful. I paid her assiduous court. I spent my modest income in so doing. She was an imperious, wilful, capricious girl and she led me into the most extravagant expenditures of my substance.

"My family was not wealthy, but we had the blood and thereby the entrée into the most exclusive circles. We Tuttlés could trace our lineage to the Virginia cavaliers. While Marian Segrist came of

newer stock, she, too, was of the aristocracy, and she was accustomed to the possession and also the spending of money. She never knew the meaning of economy or stinting. I was madly in love with her—I was not alone in that; there were many—”

At this point, Honk fell asleep and came within an eighth of an inch of falling off his stool as well. He awoke with a wild, haunted look in his eyes and borrowed a match from me. The narrator continued fervidly:

“The future looked bright to me. I found myself contemplating a marriage with Marian and entering upon an honorable career fraught with boundless possibilities. There was, in fact, no limit to the triumphant achievements to which I might rightly aspire.

“It was about this time that my father died. When his estate was settled, I found myself in possession of some ten thousand dollars. With such a sum I felt free to ask Marian Segrist to share with me the brilliant future that lay almost within my grasp—”

As Tuttle reached this heart-interesting

point in his narrative, something—it may have been the soothing monotone he employed—acted soporifically on me, so I leaned heavily against the table, and made a subconscious sneak into oblivion in the company of a heathen deity by the name of Somnus.

How's that? Morpheus—say you? Not so! Morpheus is merely an attendant around the nocturnal operating-room. Somnus is the big squeeze.

I got clear away—as far as Denver, Colorado, where I had just climbed on board a Berkeley car, for Elitch's Gardens, with a coconut-tree in one hand and a wild-cat under my arm, when somebody leading a large brown mule got on, and sat in the seat ahead. The mule kept kicking my shins, and finally I—awoke.

It was Honk who was kicking my shins under the table.

"Come out of it," he murmured in a grumpy aside. "It's my turn."

I saw that he really intended to make an issue of the matter, so I sighed and roused up. Friend Tuttle was still peregrinating with his story. He was introducing the villain at that precise moment.

"As I said, my rival was a gay, debonair, worldly-wise, self-confident, young nobody-in-particular, but there was no question about his magnetism. He was one of the most plausible and convincing rascals I have ever met. And a rascal he was — of the deepest dye. I did not concern myself about his attentions to Marian; she and I had been engaged for some time —"

I must have missed that, I thought, during the interval I'd been car-riding with the brown mule, but Tuttle went right on:

"I had all confidence in Marian. It seems, however, that I underestimated my rival's wily and dastardly nature. He was a broker of some sort at the time; engaged in the buying and selling of stocks and trading in the grain markets.

"He pretended to be my friend — in fact, we became quite intimate. He arranged several little speculative transactions for Marian, in which she made tidy sums of money. And finally, by means of honeyed words and his bland assurance, this false friend set a trap for my undoing.

"On his advice and counsel, I sold wheat short — I believe that was what he designated it. Whatever may be the term used

to cover such transactions, at the close of my foolish experiment, I found myself penniless. My ten thousand dollars was swept away like smoke before a wind.

"And when, in my hour of bitterness, I turned to Marian for sympathy and encouragement, she scorned me, heartless and selfish creature that she was. Spurned me from her presence, as though I were presuming even to expect her sympathy. She laughed mockingly, and bade me go—that she despised a weakling—that all was over between us.

"I did as she asked. I fled from her presence. In short, I abandoned all my plans, my friends, everything. I heard later she married my rival. I went to sea. I followed that life ten years; I am, in fact, a master-mariner. And then I came here. But I have wearied you with my tiresome prattle. You must have come far, and it's getting late—"

It was only two o'clock.

"Not at all," I said, yawning. "'S been very in'resting, very! Most remarkable story, 'n fact. Most remarkable. And fully in keeping with what I've always argued.

"Women will throw you down," I con-

tinued, awakening a little, "when you're least expecting it, if they take the notion. On the other hand, if they like a fellow, they'll freeze—er—er—"

I seemed to be getting muddled in my logic, so I finished with another yawn.

Honk made very few comments, for once. The subject was a little out of his line for one thing, and he was very, very sleepy. Our host indicated the two bullhide cots in the next room and told us to make ourselves comfortable thereon. Only two or three hours of the night remained, so we did not delay the game by holding a lengthy ceremonial of good nights.

We piled onto those cots and let nature take its course. Tuttle was sitting at the table tinkering with his bugs and butterflies when I lost consciousness.

I slept soundly. Honk claimed that his rest was disturbed, inasmuch as he had secured the short cot in the excitement of retiring, while the one I slept on was long and luxurious.

He said also that Tuttle sat up all night fooling with his insect collection, and that the light from the student-lamp had shone steadily in his, Honk's, eyes all night and

kept him awake. I only know that our host was in the self-same chair at the table when morning came. Honk and I argued about this before breakfast.

"When night comes, it's time to sleep," Honk grumbled, "but some people are funny that way."

I made a cursory examination of the premises.

"The reason why our host didn't go to bed," said I, "is not hard to see, if you'll use your eyes. You and I occupied the only beds there were. Where would you have the man sleep?"

After breakfast we arranged for Esteban to accompany us, with Tuttle's mule, to Santa Maria. It was somewhat of a jaunt, eighteen or twenty miles, Tuttle said. Honk and I were to take turn about riding the mule, while Esteban walked. However, he would have the privilege of riding all the way back.

Tuttle was profuse in his farewells and invited us to come again. We thanked him and shook hands, and told him to come to see us likewise at his earliest convenience, and all that sort of thing.

"I've become very much interested in

your work," said Honk. "Very much interested, indeed. And your odd views of life, as well. Who did you say this — er — broker was, who gave you the wrong dope, and afterward married your — er Miss Segrist?"

"That man?" said Tuttle grimly. "That scoundrel's name, did you ask? Ah, it is a name I will not be likely to forget. His name was Jotham P. Stringfellow."

CHAPTER IX

CHERCHEZ LA FEMME

NINE miles is really a long walk. I say nine miles, advisedly, assuming that it was eighteen miles, as Tuttle said, from his hacienda to the plaza in Santa Maria, and estimating that Honk and I each hoofed half the distance. In my opinion it was farther. A mule in good walking trim ought to bowl along at about five miles per hour. It took us eight hours. Figure it yourself.

However, the trail was like the flight of a bat, somewhat erratic. When they perpetrate a trail in the *dolce far niente* country, they follow the line of least resistance same as in everything else.

Esteban had very little English for conversational purposes, so he occupied the time rolling and smoking innumerable hand-tailored cigarettes—one every two and three-fifths minutes, I estimated.

Garbed in various articles of Tuttle's discarded clothing, Esteban made a picturesque

showing. He wore a shirt four sizes too big, trousers at least a foot too long, zapatos secured by binder twine in lieu of shoe-strings, and the whole set off by an enormous haycock of a hat.

He strutted ahead, quite inflated with his important mission of guide and escort to the distinguished *Señores Americanos*.

Santa Maria was yet silent in its siesta when we arrived. Save for the desultory yapping of a few curs our entrance passed unnoticed.

A churchyard stillness brooded in the streets; the sunlight glimmered and danced on the quiet waters of the bay. Far out, the smoke from a steamer beyond the rise drifted lazily, a smudge on the lip of the inverted bowl of the sapphire sky.

Nobody seemed to be stirring at the bungalow. Addicks lay asleep in his hammock; with a strip of mosquito-net across his face.

"Humph!" grunted Honk. "The world seems to have dropped into a delightful snooze during our absence. I notice that the lawns need cutting, too. I wonder what's become of the men? I told them to finish painting that engine-shed, and I see they haven't done it."

I gave a correct imitation of the Latin shrug.

"No hurry," said I. "There's nothing urgent. We have oodles of time," I reminded him, "to paint sheds and mow lawns. What a pudding we've fallen into down here. Nothing to do but draw our breath and our pay. It is the truly artistic life, yes. I think I shall take a nap now. Esteban, old *compañero de hike* — *adios!* Present my devotions to Herr Señor Tuttle when you return."

"*Si, señor,*" said Esteban, lighting a fresh cigarette.

I retired to my own little boudoir upstairs where I soon slept the delicious rejuvenating sleep of the unruffled in spirit. The rattle and clack of a lawnmower being driven recklessly, and the blat of loud conversation disturbed my peace and quiet presently.

With an old shoe in one hand and an empty cigar-box in the other, I slipped to the window for the purpose of taking a shot at the noisemakers beneath my retreat.

Watts was at the steering-wheel of the lawnmower; Schweitzmeyer, lugging a huge tin sprinkler, was engaged in an altercation

with McMuir over the watering of a flower-bed; and Addicks, in his hammock under the orange trees, seemed to be lying in a daze while Honk stood over him emitting a tirade of some kind, of which I caught a fragment now and then, such as "deliberate lie"; "confounded outrage"; "won't sit still and be made catspaws of."

I dropped the missiles. Something of significance must have transpired. I'm not of a curious or prying disposition, but I make it a point to keep informed on all current matters if possible.

So I went down post-haste.

"It may be three or six months," I heard Addicks say as I drew nigh. "And then your same old jobs'll be open for you. The company wanted that expressly understood. They were sorry they didn't get to see you all, but they were in a hurry, I believe they said."

"Waugh!" retorted Honk. "They think we've nothing to do but loaf around in this Heaven-forsaken hole awaiting their pleasure, do they? I don't think! They're flattering themselves a whole lot. If you want my opinion, the company is a bunch of lying scoundrels. They've fired us, all right—let

'em get somebody else when they get ready to resume building operations—if they ever do.”

I felt a sudden sinking amidships. That word “fired” always affects me strangely. Fired, were we? Then we were no longer drawing salaries. What a blow to art!

“What’s happened?” I asked.

Honk wheeled on me like an impatient steam-derrick.

“A plenty has happened,” he snapped viciously. “Stringfellow and his gang of cutthroats have been here during our two days’ absence, and they’ve used the broad-ax to a finish; discharged everybody on the job, us included, paid the whole outfit up to date, and the men have all gone home on the *Belle of the South*, with the exception of Watts, McMuir, Schweitzmeyer, and ourselves.

“The ship sailed this morning. The magnates also pulled out at daylight, in Stringfellow’s yacht, for Buenos Aires, or Capri, or Auckland, or somewhere, while you and I, Horace, are at liberty to go or stay, just as we darned please. We’re no longer needed here.”

“How aggravating!” said I fretfully. “And is Lon J. fired likewise?”

"Now you've propounded a hard one," Addicks spoke up, with the air of one deeply puzzled. "I'm blessed if I know. I paid no attention at the time. Seems to me they said my services didn't amount to very much one way or the other, but that they might possibly need me later. They gave me my money up to date, anyhow.

"Whether I'm fired or not is of little moment, however. I like the calm serenity of Santa Maria and I'm comfortably established here, so I'll stick around indefinitely. One can live here at an astonishing cheapness, as the natives say. *Esta bien!* Why don't you all decide to take it easy? It is a pleasant world. *Bebamos!*" which is to say, "Let us drink!"

The suggestion seemed apt. We made the invitation general in its scope, and the six of us strolled across to the nearest quaforium. When we had foregathered, I asked a question for my own information.

"How happens it," I interrogated Watts, "that you three didn't return to the States on the Belle of the South along with the others?"

It was McMuir who replied first.

"There's na fidget," said he. "We're monied men, wi' our pay in our pockets.

An' 'tis a guid country, as the lad just said."

"Yah, a goot blace," corroborated Schweitzmeyer. "We dond't like to leaf him av'ile yet, aind't it?"

Big Watts nodded an unqualified indorsement of the sentiment.

"We thought maybe we might try for jobs on the police force of the town," he confided. "'Twould be easy work, and they need good men for it."

I hadn't thought of it, but the idea wasn't a bad one. Honk, however, was too much disgruntled to take any but a morbid view of the situation. He nursed a grudge and said so pithily.

"You understand, gentlemen," he orated, "Horace and I entered into a contract with the H. T. P. Company to work for them for one year at stipulated salaries —"

"But later accepted increases of the same, thereby making said contract null and void," I reminded him.

He couldn't deny that fact, but it only angered him the more when he remembered it.

"Bah!" he roared. "We've been victimized by this man Stringfellow and his pals. The whole deal is an out-and-out swindle.

We came here in good faith to build a railroad. We stand ready to carry out our part of the agreement to the letter. And the party of the other part repudiates its obligations.

"It's an outrage, no more, no less. I despise such methods. For two bits I'd start something, I tell you. Who's the leader of the 'outs' here in this country?"

Addicks said he wasn't certain, but thought it was a man called Mateo, or Gonzales, or some such name.

"We might back the fellow, whoever he is," continued Honk; "start a revolution, overthrow the present government, and confiscate the H. T. P. Company's property. It'd serve 'em right, by Jinks!"

Watts, McMuir, and Schweitzmeyer sat up, profoundly impressed with the glorious possibilities of such an undertaking. You could see that they were for it, strictly. The police force appointments faded into insignificance in comparison.

Addicks slid down in his chair, and laughed until a lachrymal flood coursed down both cheeks.

"Go on," he said between spasms. "It's a great idea; let's hear more about it. No

doubt the proprietor of this joint is secreted somewhere listening, at this moment, and the word will go forth that a great liberator—or 'traidor,' as the case may be—has appeared. Either a chorus of *vivas*, or the crack of a platoon fire against a stone wall, awaits you. Perhaps both. Proceed, brother. *Viva la Libertad!*"

"Pt-t!" returned Honk. "What I said was entirely in jest. Have these people no sense of humor? I am a loyal supporter of the established government and the present administration. President What's-his-name, in my opinion, is a patriot and a gentleman from A to Izzard."

"In that case," said Addicks, continuing to laugh, "you would be considered an enemy to the cause of liberty as represented by Mateo or Gonzales, and as such you will be marked for sacrifice when the next political upheaval occurs. My felicitations, *amigo*; I drink to your health!"

"Humph!" noncommittally commented Honk. "I think I'll slip across to the shack for a little siesta. I've just remembered that I'm shy a couple of nights' sleep. Good afternoon, gents."

And he left us, without further ceremony.

We watched him depart in solemn silence.

"Then ye dinna think there'll be a revolution?" queried McMuir presently, in a disconsolate tone.

"It is doubtful," said Addicks. "Probably not — this week."

"*Der teufel!*" said Schweitzmeyer. "*Ich wurde gemust haben.*"

"Heigh-ho!" sighed Watts disappointedly. "I was just gettin' interested."

After which the three husky filibusters filed out gloomily, and straggled off in the direction of the Esplanade.

Addicks and I, left alone, discussed discursively the Panama Canal, pearl-diving, peach-and-honey as a drink, Hot Springs, Arkansas, baseball as a nervine, the aeroplane in war, and gold-mining in Alaska.

We then adjourned the session, bade each other *buenas noches* with Castilian courtesy and Addicks reëmbded himself in his hammock.

I had expected Honk to snatch forty — or even fifty — winks of sleep, for he no doubt felt the need thereof, but I hadn't looked for him to go into complete retirement.

He locked himself in his room and refused to come out, to communicate with the out-

side world, except by certain "woofs" of a bearlike description, or even to partake of nourishment, other than black coffee and cigarettes, which he ordered sent up by *muchacho* at intervals during a period of two whole days.

I'd never known him to indulge in so protracted a grouch before.

And during the course of those two days I wandered about, disengaged, and a prey to profound loneliness. Did you ever miss the last train out of a jerkwater western Kansas town on Saturday evening and find on inspection that the time-card showed a cabalistic character which signified that no train whatever was run on the line all day Sunday? And did you ever spend a month during the following thirty-six hours in a burg of that ilk?

Aha! Then we're brothers. We've both suffered the same sodden pangs of a common misery.

I prowled about the urbs and suburbs of Santa Maria in an ecstasy of dullness. I had no interest or aim in life. To move around gave me an incomparable ennui, and to sit still gripped my soul with the pangs of a gnawing pain.

I tasted the cup of idleness and found it to be asafetida, and the apple of laziness turned out wormwoody at the core. The town was an incubus, the surrounding country a nightmare, and the sea as viewed from the shore a slough of despond. But— Just before I threw a wampus fit and took to aguardiente for solace Honk came out of his hole. Not only did he come out, smiling and howdy-doing, like an acquaintance that has been away on his vacation, but he announced with no small degree of pride that he had forever solved the problem of constructing a solar-motor that would actually solar-motor and keep on solar-moting indefinitely.

That was what he'd been incubating during his hibernation, he said. He'd been making blueprints and india-ink drawings of a sun-engine, and incidentally he thought the hatch had been fully commensurate to the irksome preliminary of two days' brooding.

Ordinarily the chances were I might have pooh-poohed such an announcement, on its physiognomy, but in my then highly moribund state of mental decay I hailed the news much as a Dominecker rooster greets the dawn—with loud crowings, flappings, and

squawks of indorsement. At that particular time a solar-motor seemed the one thing my starving inactivities needed in their business.

"It ought to fill a long-felt want," said I with enthusiasm. "I'll help you build the doggoned thing at once. Whereabouts now would be a good place to put it?"

"In the sun, of course," he returned flipantly. "However, I'm sorry to say that the best we can do at present will be to construct a working model. The only lenses we have at hand are those small ones I happened to fetch along in my trunk; and the largest of those is only twelve inches, I think. To build a really practicable motor with a working capacity of say a hundred horse-power we would have to have lenses probably twenty times as big—"

At this point he launched himself with a mighty splash into the deep water of a complex and lengthy technical diatribe on heat units, compound double-convex triple-expansion, back-firing refractors, multiple gears, lost motion, tungsten, manganese bronze, carbon dioxid, N-rays, and the number of degrees centigrade at which water is reduced to a dry powder.

I waded around in the shallows near shore until he returned to *terra cognita* again. Technically, I am no technologist; I prefer my science broken up with a pick and served *a la carte*.

"Still, we can make shift to build a small-sized toy sun-motor, just to sort of pass the time the rest of this week," Honk added as an afterthought in words of one syllable.

"Sure," said I. "To do so will be very diverting and piquant. It arouses my enthusiasm to think of it. We'll build a mimic village, with little wooden people sliding in and out of church, and hay-wagons, and dogs, and chickens, and a train running through a tunnel, all to be kept going with the motor.

"We can charge ten centavos admission to see the thing in operation, and reap quite a harvest. It would all be profit —"

I rubbered thoughtfully at the sizzle of blazing sunlight outside our window.

"And there's plenty of cheap fuel available," I concluded.

Honk seemed, if anything, rather amused.

"I hope you won't feel offended if I snicker at your ideas, Horace," he said, suiting the action to the word. "But, my dear

sir—oh, my dear sir!—a scientific achievement like a sun-motor has much larger possibilities in it than furnishing motive-power for a penny arcade. No, the hand-to-mouth existence of a ten-cent mountebank does not appeal to me. It may to you, but it doesn't to me. I wouldn't take it amiss, though, if you staked me to a small chew of your eating tobacco."

The controversy being thus amicably adjusted, we proceeded to unpack Honk's trunkful of gimcracks and to roll up our sleeves and get busy. Honk did the heavy thinking and frowning, and I did the lifting and grunting, so to speak.

Between the two of us we soon had the second-floor front parlor of the H. T. P. Company's ex-officio headquarters building, that we'd pressed into service as a workshop, looking like the abode of a perpetual motionist.

Now, if you'd like the description in detail of the construction of the first Simpson sun-engine, I will—you don't care for it? Oh, very well. That simplifies the matter for me.

The work beguiled us when we might otherwise have languished in morose or

quarrelsome humors, during that period of necessary waiting for a ship to carry us north. It saved us from ourselves and each other, for I've no doubt that if we hadn't kept busy that week we'd have scratched each other's faces over some trifle, so upsetting is enforced inaction on the energetic Anglo-Saxon spirit.

When I felt an inclination to hold an autopsy over the loss of that hundred and fifty or seventy-five, a week, I had but to engage myself in some trivial experiment of a semiserio-scientific nature to dispel the morbid fancies that threatened.

For instance, I connected up a cluster of dry cells with a pipe wrench on a chair and a sheet of boiler-plate on the floor, and Schweitzmeyer's look of surprise, consternation, perplexity and indignation when he picked up the wrench amply compensated me for my bother.

My most interesting experiment, however, was entirely impromptu and unpremeditated. We had a trio of bulged-out windows in one end of the workroom; they overlooked a part of the bay—hence the name bay-window applied as a generic term. Addicks' hammock, usually with him in it,

was swung just beneath this bay-window between two immemorial orange-trees.

One sunny noonday I stood our biggest lens in the window casement momentarily while I manufactured a cigarette and admired the view. After a few seconds I heard a thump, something like when the pumpkins begin to fall from the trees in late autumn.

With ready acumen I traced the sound to its source, instantly, and saw Addicks picking himself up from where his swaying couch had deposited him when the rope that held it suspended suddenly parted.

He muttered some charm or incantation, dusted himself off, and proceeded to repair the sundered strand by lifting the severed ends and tying them together in a clumsy, landlubber's knot. He then reclined himself luxuriously to resume his snoozing.

This time I observed the mishap with my own eyes. A curl of blue smoke arose from the knot in the rope; then it parted with a rush; and down went Addicks for the second time with another resounding thump.

He commented on the matter freely — in fact, I may say, unreservedly, in both Spanish and English idioms.



“Down went Addicks for the second time.”

Meanwhile I marveled at what I had seen. Ha! 'Twas a mysterious affair, truly. I felt more or less goose-pimply over it for a minute.

I had actually watched that rope burn in two, consumed, as it were, by fire from some invisible and decidedly spookish source. It was enough to make one feel creepy.

And then I happened to think of the lens. Bah! The mystery was solved. What a commonplace cause for so startling an effect after all.

The old sun-and-burning-glass gag that has been the perennial plot for short stories since the first amateur scribbler scratched the original version on a clay tablet with his thumbnail in the year 1912 B. C.

I chuckled amusedly.

"What's up?" asked Honk with his habitual inquisitiveness.

"Come see," said I. "I'll demonstrate it for you. It'll be easier."

Addicks, bending over with his back toward us, was mending the broken cord for the second time; he stood just out of line of the invisible heat ray.

I moved the double convex glass disk the sixteenth of an inch.

Addicks leaped into the air with a wild yell, clutching at that portion of his anatomy which had been exposed to the concentrated smiles of old Sol.

"Fire and brimstone!" he shouted. "I'm stung or shot, or something!"

Honk let out a bray of discordant merriment which gave Addicks a tangible clue to our whereabouts as well as a fairly clear idea of the source of his discomfiture.

He shook an accusative fist and limped off in the direction of the nearest *pulperia*.

Such incidents as these may seem trivial and puerile when viewed from the vantage of the North, where the hurry and bustle, the whang and bang of traffic on busy streets, and the whoop and hurrah of life prevail at all times; where the tide of endless comings and goings, of fights, frivolities, successes, failures, hardships, and easy money—always amid the blare and fanfare of trumpets—is ever at flood; and where, happily, there's something doing every minute out of the fourteen hundred and forty.

In Santa Maria, though, such things were very exciting and eventful. No mere dog brawl could compete for actual human interest.

I may as well state, last as first, that the solar-motor wasn't completed as we had it prearranged. It pleased the unfathomable whim of an unguessable Providence to jumble the cards and jiggle the board at the inopportune moment.

To me it was but another evidence of that ancient jealousy, existent among the gods who browse around the crags and gullies of Mount Olympus, which is directed, and always has been directed against the works of men since time first began to be reckoned.

The sentiment is very feelingly expressed in the words of Oleander, the shepherd poet, afterward unluckily drowned while taking his annual bath in the Pond Asinorum, at Rome, Italy. The translation is verbatim et nauseam.

'Twas ever thus, from childhood's day,
The best-laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft
agley.

Thursday night of that week, some time between curfew and dawn, a long, sharp-nosed, sleek-looking craft put into the harbor and lay lazily at rest, in plain view of anybody that had energy enough to look

when the sun rose out of the sea in the morning.

I do not mean to insinuate that Honk and I were up when this solar-marine exhibition took place.

We arose an hour or two later. It was then light enough to see the word "Imogen" neatly stenciled abaft of the vessel's wishbone.

From the wicker deck-chairs, striped awnings, the glint of brasswork and the general air of spickness and spanness, I judged that she was neither a fruit steamer nor one of those vagabond tubs they call a tramp-freighter.

Her smokestack was painted white with a black band around the middle. A couple of what looked like gasoline launches, or street-cars, or something, covered with canvas, reposed on the rear deck. A blue pennant with some kind of a monogrammed device in gold upon it fluttered from a flag-pole up front.

While we took stock of these details there was nobody in sight on board. Directly afterward little doors opened here and there, hatches unhatched, and the cabin spat forth upon deck a regular furor of female figures

in white duck suits and yachting caps, carrying parasols, fans, field-glasses and similar miscellany.

I counted five women for sure, and one that looked like a man. Orders were given and several sailors, or employees of the ship, popped out of another hole somewhere and ran to lower a skiff that dangled over the side.

"They're coming ashore," said Honk in the manner of one who had discovered something that no one else even dared to suspect.

"Oh, are they?" I returned. "Thanks. I had a notion they were about to run a foot-race across the bay."

CHAPTER X

THE LADIES HAVE THEIR INNINGS

HONK straightened his string tie and let down his shirt sleeves, as three ladies and the duck-clad macaroni who appeared to be in charge of the tour fluttered into the small boat and were propelled strandward by a pair of husky A. B.'s wearing blue tam-o'-shanters.

"Think they'll call here?" I queried sarcastically. "I see you're fluffing up a bit, all of a sudden. Shall I put out your Sunday suit for you?"

"They're disembarking," he said, craning his neck. "Wouldn't surprise me at all if they do drop in on us. My nose itched all day yesterday, and that's a sure sign of company."

A covey of unbedecked kids and sniffing canines, interspersed by a sprinkling of nondescript grown-ups, met the strangers at the city's gate and accorded them a welcome of the usual stares of the idly curious. I mut-

tered something about "the rubber band" meeting all visitors, and returned to my work-bench. The mere act of staring, or gazing, wholly for the sake of seeing, or — as it were — looking, is — er — rather on the bourgeois, I think. I dislike to be caught at it.

Honk doesn't seem to have any such finely drawn scruples, so he remained on the qui vive at the window for several minutes longer.

"They either went to the custom-house or to the United States Consulate," he reported finally. "I lost 'em in that block. They're elderly ladies. I thought one of 'em was young at first, but I guess I was mistaken. How's your plug holding out? That valve-pin looks at least a sixteenth of an inch too long. You might get Mac to thread that cross-arm bolt for you, if he's sober—" etc., etc.

He toyed with an alligator wrench and a plumb-bob five or ten minutes, whistling some light and airy two-step tune meanwhile, and then he decided to go down to the machine-shop, where the H. T. P. Company's locomotive sat dead and deserted, ostensibly to see if he could purloin a journal-

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brass and some copper wire. What for, he didn't say.

I lit my pipe and knocked off work.

The sight of that black-and-white striped



“ ‘The rubber band’ meeting all visitors.”

yacht riding so jauntily out there in the blue bay gave me a slight twinge of nostalgia in my bones. I fell to dreaming a pensive pipe-dream of home, of somewhere where people dress decently and talk a civilized language.

A blue-eyed, red-whiskered dragon-fly whirred through the window like a toy monoplane and settled expertly on the spout of an oil-can. And a yellow-billed, green blackbird, perched in the heart of a cabbage palm just outside, made a noise like somebody unlatching a gate. Otherwise, city and State lay at ease, inert in the sizzling sunshine.

Then four white-clad figures trickled out from between the hay-cocks that marked the end of the *Calle Esencial*, and came across lots toward the bungalow. I saw them coming, therefore I had ample time to don my fatigue-jacket and remove a layer or two of grime from my hands at the portable tin lavatory.

I waited at the rear of what had been planned to be the general waiting-room for the knock or halloo which would signify that the visitors had actually arrived. They fooled me by scouting around the outside as if they owned the premises, and coming in at a side door as unceremoniously as a neighbor about to borrow a bar of soap.

When they saw me, the ladies said, "Oh!" and "Ah!" and the man in the party twisted his vestige of a mustache and nodded more or less politely.

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There was one large, officious-looking woman, one not quite so bulky, and a slender one who wore earrings. The ladies were all well past the vernal equinox in years, to make a hasty hazard; the man was really



"The portable tin lavatory."

young — one of the peaches-and-cream kind at that.

"Good morning," said the large lady ponderously, fixing me with an inquiring eye.

"This building was pointed out to us as being the office of the Honduras Tropical Products Company. Where is the manager? The place seems deserted. What hours do the company's representatives keep, please?"

"Good morning," I returned politely. "This is the company's building, all right, but the manager isn't in at this moment. He is — er — out. I don't know when he'll be in. Will you — ah — be seated?"

"This is rather a helter-skelter state of affairs, Archie," remarked the large lady to the young man. "What do you make of it?"

"Ahem! It is so," he made of it.

"I'll call Mr. Simpson," said I. "He was — that is, he isn't any more — but he used to be chief engineer, you know. He's well informed about the company's business, and he loves to talk —" I turned to the window nearest, and called lustily, "Oh, Simpson!" with great importance.

"S-st!" said Honk, who was listening, crouched within a foot of me. I composed my features and reported to the visitors: "Mr. Simpson will be in directly," said I suavely, "but perhaps you wished to see the manager personally?"

"We did and we do," boomed the large lady aggressively.

Honk entered at that moment with a great show of surprise and polite inquiry wrinkling his noble brow.

"Permit me," I bowed, as he approached. "Mr. Hancock Simpson, formerly chief constructing engineer for the H. T. P. Company. Meet Mr. — er — ah —"

"Cushing," supplied Archie promptly. "And these ladies are — Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Robison" — I thought the names quite odd — "stockholders in the Honduras Tropical Products Company," he added. "We ran down to look over the property, you know."

A great white light burst, in a shower of sparks, inside my cerebral cavity. So these were Stringfellow's little lambs, were they? O-ho! A-ha!

"Charmed," said Honk. "We will be glad to give you such information on the subject as we may be fortunate enough to possess. Quite pleased —"

Mrs. Brown took the initiative in the hearing of testimony that followed. She was not offensive in word or tone, but very impatient and a little bit testy. An ideal cross-questioner, as it were.

"How far has this projected railroad been completed?" came first.

"You can see the end from this west window," said Honk, pointing.

"What! It stops a paltry dozen feet away. Preposterous! The prospectus stated that it was to be extended fifty miles into the interior at once. Young man, don't joke with me!"

"Facts are facts," said Honk. "The work was stopped and everybody discharged before we got started."

"I want to know!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown vehemently. The phrase evidently served her in lieu of an expletive. She breathed freer. "Who ordered the work stopped?" she demanded.

"Jotham P. Stringfellow, president of the company."

"He did, did he? What became of the men employed?"

"With the exception of three, and of us two, they returned to the States."

"The prospectus issued by the company states that a ship, or ships, makes regularly scheduled trips between Santa Maria and the Gulf ports. Has any fruit been shipped thus far?"

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"None. The Belle of the South maintains no regular schedule."

"I want to know! And do I understand that you gentlemen are no longer regularly employed by the company?"

"That is a fact. Neither he nor myself are connected with the company at present."

"This building belongs to the company, does it not? How does it come that we find you men in possession of it? Is there no one in charge of the properties?"

"A man named Addicks is sort of—"

"Where is this man named Addicks?"

"He's probably somewhere near. At the café, getting his—breakfast, maybe."

"Breakfast? At eleven o'clock? Humph!" said Mrs. Brown.

"I'll see if I can find him," said I promptly, reaching for my hat.

"I wouldn't mind to go along if you don't object," said Archie. I told him I could stand it if he could, so we set out together in quest of Addicks. Outside, friend Archie dug up a souvenir cigarette-case and passed the cork-tipped Egyptians. I decided that he had been raised a pet. As we had but one match between us, the conventionalities were swept aside at once and we became acquainted.

"Nice craft you have out there in the bay," I said. "Steam yacht, ain't it?"

"Yes. The Imogen isn't bad for a two-hundred-footer. She belongs to my worthy father. He's in the banking business in New York." Young Cushing blew a succession of smoke-rings, and grew suddenly solemn. "I'm in a deuce of a scrape," he confided with the impulsiveness of youth and inexperience. "I've got these women into a financial pickle. You chaps may, or may not, know it, but Stringfellow and his crowd are sharks. I found it out a little late, but I'm convinced of it."

"We're onto him down here," I commented briefly.

"I'll explain the whole matter," he continued. "You see, I'm twenty-three and the first of this year dad decided that I had to go to work. He chose a profession for me—that of broker—buying and selling stocks, bonds and so forth on commission. What I don't know about such things would—but, anyhow, dad was very insistent about it. Some weeks ago I received an elaborate prospectus of the Honduras Tropical Products Company—fine, deckle-edged, with half-tones and attractive views of this

country, brimful of wondrous word-pictures of the fruit and hardwoods trade. There was also a big block of stock offered temporarily at par.

"Now, I've a wide acquaintance in a social way, you know, and when my friends heard that I'd gone in for a business career, they began to call at my office in droves to wish me luck. Among them came half a dozen members of the Amarynth Bridge Club one day. One of the exclusive social organizations of the city—immensely fashionable, wealthy women, and all that sort of thing. Of course, nothing would do but that they must buy some stocks or something to help me out. Some one among them found the H. T. P. Company's booklet, and they decided to buy the entire offering of shares at once. Four of them subscribed to the purchase, and insisted that I close the deal, which I accordingly did. You met three of them a few moments ago—"

"And the fourth?" I asked.

"Is Miss Frances Vandiver. She didn't come ashore this morning because of letters to write. She is my chief worry. The others are women of wealth, while Fran—

Miss Vandiver is comparatively poor. She invested all of her modest capital in this venture, and she is in a fair way to lose it all. The stock has been steadily on the decline since they bought. It was quoted at twenty-eight when we sailed a week ago.

"I've been in a strain trying to keep the news from those ladies, but I'm not sure they don't suspect something. Mrs. Brown is very astute. I finally proposed that we take a little run down to inspect the property. The idea appealed to them, so we came. Miss Vandiver's aunt, Mrs. Beverly-Travis, accompanied her. I am afraid the Stringfellow crowd have us. But that prospectus was very alluring. Those half-tones were superb. I readily recognized you and Simpson, from your pictures in it."

At this point, I remembered Billbro. That had been his doing.

Cushing continued: "Miss Vandiver fell in love with those views. She is of a romantic turn. There was one tall, dark-haired fellow who wore a broad-brimmed Panama and white duck that particularly caught her fancy; she thought him very picturesque; he seemed to be present in a number of the pictures."

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"That was Addicks," I remarked. "But I never noticed anything picturesque or romantic about him myself. Here's the *pulperia de la Vivienda*," I said, pausing, "and we'll likely find him within. You'll be able to see for yourself how he looks in the flesh."

This statement was borne out by the facts. Lon J., in a highly beatific state, was seated at a table, engaged in the genial occupation of quaffing a health to all the world.

He waved a greeting when he saw me, and hammered with an empty bottle on a tin platter to attract the attention of the *mozo de café*. I brought my companion forward and introduced him in my usual graceful manner.

"Mr. Cushing is accompanied by the minority stockholders of the H. T. P. Company, who are down on a tour of inspection," I explained glibly.

"'Tis well," said Addicks. "Have seats, gentlemen. Boy bring *vino* of the reddest for *los caballeros*. For me, *aguardiente de grano*. At best, the country is old-fashioned in its drinkables. But what we lose in quality we try to make up in quantity. When did you arrive, *Señor Cushing*?"

"During the night," replied the broker civilly. "In the yacht Imogen."

"I noticed her in the harbor," Addicks commented. "Your health, *señores!*"

"Three of the ladies are waiting across the way to see you," Cushing ventured, after the lapse of a few minutes.

"Ladies?" said Addicks. "Ladies?"

"Yes. There is one other, with her aunt on board the yacht. They own a considerable block of stock in the company, and quite naturally they are surprised that the work has been stopped — on the railroad and everything. They wish to find out what can be done, if possible. They have quite a lot of money invested, you understand? You are the accredited representative of the company, I believe?"

"Suppose we amble over, anyhow, while we're resting," I suggested.

I wanted Addicks to meet Mrs. Brown, if nothing else. He apparently had no taste for such a move, but his hesitation was only momentary.

"Excuse me for a second," he said. "I — er — perhaps I ought to change my linen. I'm hardly presentable for the company of ladies. I'll step up-stairs to my room, if I may?"

Cushing nodded in understanding.

The second that Addicks craved lengthened into an interval, while we waited. Cushing presently began to fidget. I, too, became impatient. I beckoned to the *mozo*.

"Bid the *Señor* Addicks to hasten his toilet," I directed. "Say to him to skate up; that Christmas is coming and will find us still here. He went up-stairs to change his shirt."

The boy returned soon.

"*El Señor* Addicks have *vamose*," he reported. "He have go quietly to out by the back door, say Emilio who watch the oven of a pan that may not burn. *Señor* Addicks have gone this muchness of feefteen minute to the out."

"Very good," I said. "He probably found that he had no collar of a sufficient cleanness to wear. He has gone forth, therefore, to negotiate the purchase of another. We will wait."

We did so, for half of another hour. The prodigal did not reappear. I found myself forced to admit that it looked like he had given us the shake.

Cushing and I retraced our steps to the bungalow and modestly confessed that we

had located Addicks only to have him slip, eel-like, between our fingers.

"The guy must know something," I said mysteriously. "There's something wrong somewhere, and he's afraid to confront these people. There's a fly in the consommé or a darky in the woodpile. I shall ferret the matter out at once, if it takes me over a month to do it."

"Never mind," spoke up Mrs. Brown. "I believe we understand the state of affairs very well, since we've talked with Mr. Simpson. He has informed us of many things of which we were unaware. We are quite clear as to the base schemes of the directors of this company. This person Addicks is merely a tool in the hands of his employers. We intend to put into execution some plan whereby we may upset the whole plot. We weren't born yesterday, fortunately. Archie, we will now go to the telegraph office, if you please. We wish to send a cablegram. Good afternoon."

Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Robison rose dutifully and followed in the wake of their redoubtable leader. The cortège disappeared around a jog in the street that staggered drunkenly seaward.

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"Well, what do you make of it all?" I asked.

Honk yawned.

"I don't see what they can do. Seems to be a case of tough medicine, but the directions say take it, just the same. The only thing that would put the thing on a paying basis and consequently cause the stock to boom would be to go ahead and complete the road, which they have neither money nor authority to do. I told 'em just that. I'm—um—sleepy. Guess I'll take a nap."

"I'm going out to look for Addicks," said I. "I'll see you later."

I had no definite plan as to what I intended to do with Addicks if I found him, but I didn't let that deter me. I've noticed that the right move will oftentimes occur to one when the time comes. It was a short hunt. My man hailed me from the window of the Bodegon Hofmeister, a restaurant with a sauerkraut accent, five or six blocks distant from the bungalow.

"Pause, pilgrim," said he. "If the coast is clear of ladies, I'll join you."

"I think you'll be safe," I said with irony. "They have gone some little time ago. Be-

sides, they said they didn't care to see you anyway."

"Good!" he exclaimed. "I'm glad of it. I don't care to hold any long-winded embroglios with them, either. In fact, whenever you get mixed up in a business entanglement with a lot of women you're in for a power of annoyance. The shortest way out is not to get in in the first place," he declared with philosophical ambiguity.

"O woman! In our hours of ease—uncertain, coy, and hard to please," he quoted. "I s'pose they found Simpson and gave him a good tongue-lashing?"

"Well, no," I said. "He seemed to get on with 'em all right. But they're here to start something. There's going to be war in this camp, I opine."

"I'll amble down toward my hammock, I reckon," he said weakly. "Going that way?" I nodded in the affirmative. "And so your manicured friend Cushing and his party are going to stay a while, are they?" he mused, as we plodded. I was wary.

"I cannot say," I returned shortly.

"My dear sir!" he said. "I'm not pumping. Let me define my position. Here am I, taking my ease. I eat, drink, sleep, and

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listen to the singing of the birds—the prattle of the sea, gamboling on the sands. I am content. But here comes a passel of disgruntled people who desire nothing so much as to stir up a fuss. They wish to parley and rush up and down in the heat and perspire and ask foolish questions and hold conferences. I know 'em. I've seen women engaged in such enterprises before. When I heard that there were women mixed up in this business I at once decided to have nothing to do with it. It would be entirely too upsetting and demoralizing for a philosopher like me. Why should I allow myself to be disturbed, all to no purpose? Why should I?"

"I see," said I. "You seek no additional tasks to avoid in connection with those arduous duties you are already busily engaged in side-stepping."

"Our friend Simpson has an idea he can play seven-up," remarked Addicks irrelevantly. "Shall we go up for a hand or two, in the interest of science?"

I was ever of a researchful nature at heart, so we went up. Honk was sleeping noisily on a cot by the window, and was disposed to be cranky when we disturbed him.

Seven-up at a quarter a corner, and a run of luck presently restored his good humor. He won three seventy-five or four dollars before Addicks or I began seriously to play.

I don't care to win all the time, anyhow. I'm a sport for sport's sake. And Addicks, at best, was too lazy to keep track of his points.

Conversationally, though, everybody made a showing. With the keen insight, biting wit, and profound wisdom of three crossroads grocery-store savants, we diagnosed, dissected, and discussed the Honduras Tropical Products Company, going and coming, from patent-applied-for to notice-of-dissolution.

We anathematized the methods of Stringfellow and his associates, mildly sympathized with Mrs. Brown et al., and apostrophized Cushing as a ninny of the first magnitude, and altogether to blame for the women being inveigled into the matter at all.

"However," said Honk, "as far as Horace and I are concerned, I think, we are just waiting for a ship to take us back north, so why worry?"

"And I," said Addicks, "am indifferent to friend or foe, so long as I am enabled to get my proper rest, from day to day."

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As for me, I held my peace and played high, low, jack, and forty-three for game in the interest of science. The time passed very pleasantly for perhaps an hour after that. Honk lost steadily and began to quarrel with his cards.

"Why, bless Pat, if it isn't suppertime!" he announced later after consulting his watch. "The sun'll be down in about ten minutes. It's too dark to distinguish an ace from a deuce, now—"

"Listen," I commanded. "I hear somebody down-stairs."

"Hello!" called Honk. "Come up, whoever you are!"

There was a rustling below, and the staircase creaked. Then a cluster of feminine faces superimposed on an array of white jackets with sailor collars trimmed in blue appeared in the doorway. One—two—three, maybe more of them; Mrs. Brown, Mrs. S—anyhow, they had us cornered.

Addicks sat, dully apathetic, and all unmindful of the strange and untoward destiny that at that moment was about to achieve his utter undoing. For Addicks was then and there to meet Her.

She was with the bunch.

Probably you've guessed already that I'm referring to Miss Frances Vandiver.

Now, please keep your seats, everybody! There's no verbal altitude flight about to take place. No rapturous rhapsody of maudlin metaphor or dizzy whirl of cavorting colloquialisms is imminent. No dance of diatribes to golden-haired goddesses with violet eyes or sonnets to cherry lips or drivel to divine curves, dainty dimples, or snowy throats. At least, not just yet.

I saw Fanny Vandiver and Honk saw her. It is true the light was growing dim at the time. Still we afterward saw her in the garish glare of noontide and neither of us was stricken. She was no Andromeda or Chryseis, or Helen of Troy, by the distance one of Uncle Samuel's dreadnaughts can fling a twelve-inch shell. She didn't grate on the eye, you understand. Not at all.

But she wasn't the kind of girl who would cause me to turn around twice to see if she looked back.

She was tallish, graceful, clear-skinned and had all the necessary features—eyes, hair, teeth, ears, nose, etc.,—apparently in good order.

But Addicks—poor Addicks! He fell at

the first fire. He was adrift without sail or rudder from the start. I saw that it was all day with him the minute he first glimpsed her in the doorway. Speechless and unnerved, he sat and gazed — gazed with child-like wonderment and admiration. The whole bunch of them swarmed into the room, but I'm satisfied that Addicks saw only one.

Mrs. Brown, I think it was, held a cable message in her hand. She tendered the same to Honk — Mrs. Brown was partial to Honk from the outset — who unfolded it with a flourish and read it at a glance.

Mrs. Brown said: "It is shameful! Despicable! Quoted at 16! The idea! I want to know!" and Cushing agreed with what she said unreservedly. Mrs. Robison mildly intimated that the thing was "scandalous!" and Mrs. Smith blew her nose viciously. And then Miss Vandiver spoke in dulcet tones:

"Oh, Mr. Addicks, I am so pleased to know you. Don't you think that horrid company has treated us just awfully?"

Addicks took the hand she extended, gingerly at first, but rallied bravely at the contact. I noticed that it affected him like a

live wire—he was both electrified and unable to let go. He retained the hand as if it had been given him to keep indefinitely.

“I think as you do,” he told her hoarsely. “It’s an outrage. I—I—”

The booming voice of Mrs. Brown thundered through the room.

“But we do not intend to sit quietly and allow ourselves to be robbed in any such manner!” she said explosively.

“There is unfortunately no alternative,” said Honk. “If the railroad were completed, and the trade established, there might be a chance, as I believe I said before. But you haven’t the means, or the men, or—most of all—the authority to pursue the work to a successful conclusion. Therefore, I—”

“We have plenty of money when it comes to that!” said Mrs. Smith sharply.

“And I suppose we can hire men, if necessary,” added Mrs. Robison.

“As for the authority,” declaimed Mrs. Brown, “I will assume the authority. Who will undertake to stop us, I want to know? Humph! Let them try it! We intend to build this railroad—at once! And in this connection, we will need the services of you gentlemen.”

Honk flared up with the radiance of a newly trimmed arc lamp. "By Jove, I'm with you!" he declared enthusiastically.

Nobody ever accused me of deserting a friend, so my course was the natural one under the circumstances.

"As for me," I barked. "Three cheers! I am yours, ma'am."

"You will help us, too, will you not, Mr. Addicks?" piccoloed Miss Vandiver naively. "You know we just must have you on our side!"

Honk and I turned with one accord to spotlight our whilom sluggard in this moment of terrible crisis. A miracle had been wrought in the man. He no longer slouched, a slipshod, happy-go-lucky fellow, following the line of least resistance, but stood straight, alert, champing the bit and pawing the pavement.

His eyes flashed and scintillated in the gathering twilight. He threw out his chest. It struck me all at once that the rascal was picturesque and romantic-looking after all.

"Will I help? I will! I'll help tear up and remodel Central America if you say so, Miss Vandiver. Count on me. I promise you. Command me, and I will hasten to do your bidding!" he proclaimed loudly.

"Oh, thank you so much," she cooed.

"We have but a few months," he went on.
"Stringfellow and his gang will return
shortly. We must get busy."

CHAPTER XI

THE AWAKENING OF ADDICKS



HIS chronicle has drifted far enough. It now behooves us to rip up the flooring for fuel, chain down the safety-valve, advance the spark, crowd on the canvas, and otherwise whip up from hither hence. Action shall be the watchword. Aye, aye! Lean in when we hit the curves, please!

A startling thing transpired early the morning following events of the evening just described. Honk and I, serene in the knowledge that our full names once more lent dignity to a pay-roster, had clambered into bed and slept like four-year-olds. Eight, or even nine, o'clock in the morning, doubtless, would have found us so engaged had we not suffered a rude awakening.

Did I say rude? In reality it was barbarous—uncouth.

I was awakened by a clamor at our boudoir windows at the unheard of hour of four A. M. Sounds as of gravel being thrown

against the walls, and unmusical outcries, and raucous halloos.

Zounds and little fishes! It was enough to make a perfect lady lose control of her dudgeon. In the gray, gruesome dimness that precedes dawn by a good half-hour I groped my way to the nearest window, traversing a tangled maze of chairs and other impedimenta, to ascertain who, which, or what was to blame for the disturbance.

Addicks, completely clad even to hat and shoes, also garbed in bib overalls and carrying a lighted lantern, pranced about, like a wild ass, in the yard below.

"Oo-hoo! Oo-hoo!" he yodeled. "Come out of it, you lazy mutts! Oo-hoo! Wake up, men!" Clackety-clack-clack! Clack! The latter affront being perpetrated by means of a stick raked up and down the side of the building.

"Hey, you!" I shouted. "Begone, there! W'at'smatter 'thyou, Diogenes?"

"Ah, there you are!" he said, peering through the gloom. "'Tis time you were getting up. I was just about to come after you with a pail of water!"

"What deviltry are you up to?" I asked.

"Deviltry?" he echoed. "Nothing of the

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kind. There's work to do to-day, man. We've got to get busy. Time is flying, and we haven't a minute to lose. Aren't we going to build this railroad?"

Honk, aroused by the interchange of yells, barked the leg of a chair with his shin, in the room back of me, and came, snarling and spitting, to the window.

"Wha — who is it, curse 'em?" he growled.

"It's Addicks," I elucidated, "giving an imitation of a call-boy. Says it's time to get up and go to work on a railroad or something —"

"Just as well hop out, you two," insisted the disturber below, corroborating my statement. "'Cause I'll keep on raising Ned till you do. This is our busy day."

"Think of that!" marveled Honk. "Old, lazy, sweet-do-nothing Addicks, up before daybreak, clamoring to go to work. I must be dreaming. Pinch me!"

I did so. I am an expert pincher.

"Ow-ouch!" he squealed. "I didn't mean that literally, confound you!"

We slipped on the outward habiliments called for in polite society, and stumbled down-stairs and into the clammy, gray murk outside. It was a weird hour for an honest

man to be stirring abroad, but there was Diog—well, the case was unusual.

“Breakfast—” I began.

“There’s no café open at this time of night,” grunted Honk.

Addicks produced a flask of the vile grog of the country.

“A drink and a toothpick,” said he, “is all a true Southern gentleman requires on such an occasion. The world’s greatest minds have been nourished on the same. It is the food of poets, statesmen, and philosophers. Drink hearty, gentlemen. I myself have already breakfasted from the same bottle.”

Which was well—for when Honk and I had helped ourselves there was scant picking left for any who might come after us.

I do not seek, in the foregoing, to flaunt the Jolly Roger of intemperance in the faces of those who content themselves with milder beverages like Dr. Duckbill’s Liver Balm. Certainly not! The bibbling of sundry and various extracts of artificial cheer, brewed and distilled, is an invidious and pernicious procedure. I deplore the practice. I—but the fact remains that that particular breakfast acted instantaneously.

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"Well, men," said Honk, rubbing his hands briskly. "Let's start the ball to rolling. First off, we need men for this job. A young army of 'em. Native help is next to no help at all, but I suppose we'll be forced to make use of it; at least, for the present. Addicks, how about you? Can you muster a gang of, say, twenty, fifty, or a hundred of these burnt-sienna loafers by nine o'clock?"

"I don't doubt but what I can," said Addicks promptly. "But say! Have either of you noticed that that fellow Cushing is — er — rather attentive to Miss Vandiver?"

I said that I hadn't observed any such awkwardness on his part, at which Addicks looked pained and surprised, and seemed disposed to argue that and several other points, beginning at the beginning.

"Oh, say," interposed Honk. "Let's cut out the flub-dub, please. What's this Cushing, or Miss Vandiver, got to do with the business in hand? We want men. You say you can get them. Very good! Have everybody report at the engine-shed. In the mean time I'll hunt up Watts, Mac, and Schweitzmeyer, and also get the instruments ready to start running the line. Horace, I

wish you'd take an inventory of everything we have available in the way of building materials—ties, steel and such like—and see about tools, too, by the way. We may have to wire a rush order north. Is everything clear now? If so, why not begin at once?"

"I'm off," said Addicks hastily. "I'll scare up a bunch of laborers without much trouble. Don't worry." And he set off, jauntily swinging the lantern on which the first rays of the rising sun glistened in eloquent promise of the glorious day about to illuminate a snoozing world. Shaken by a sudden hysteria, I leaned against the side of the bungalow limply.

"By Jove! he does look ridiculous, don't he?" cackled Honk.

The blazing sun rose over Santa Maria within a few minutes thereafter, to view—if the genial orb of day by chance takes cognizance of the puppet doings of men on this globule of mud and water called the earth—a scene of unusual bustle and activity in our hamlet.

Up one street and down another galloped Addicks, astride a knock-kneed sorrel pony which he had obtained from the stable of the innkeeper, Enrique Valdez, after routing out



"Up one street and down another galloped Addicks."

the entire staff of the establishment. The task of superinducing a gallop from the aforesaid steed was in itself a disturbance of the peace, as the animal had no English whatever and but scanty respect for the lingo of his fatherland.

Taking him to and fro, therefore, Addicks as an employment-agent left stir and hulla-baloo in his wake. Of a sureness there must necessarily be astonishing things on foot, for it was the word of *el Señor* Addicks himself that "feefty, a hundred, perhaps a thousand—un *millar*—able-bodied men should be assembled by nine of the clock! *Seguramente!* Was it to be a revolution? No? Yes?"

Addicks careered up to the engine-shed at intervals of half an hour, with from one to a dozen recruits in tow on each trip.

"Seven or eight out of every ten think we're getting ready to disrupt the government secretly, or they wouldn't have come," he assured me. "And the best way to convince 'em of it is to deny the imputation. I don't see anybody stirring on board the Imogen, do you? They must've sat up late last evening."

And, with kicks and maledictions, he'd set off on his quest again.

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Within a couple of hours he had a motley crowd of half a hundred or more barefoot Caribs and mixed breeds mobilized and ready for the fray. At seven-thirty he wandered in, convoying ten or twelve more, among whom were two ex-officio soldiers of the republic, attracted, he said, by the promise of actual money for services rendered, supplemented by repeated denials that a political upheaval was imminent.

"Any signs of life on board yet?" he asked in passing.

"Just noticed smoke issuing from the cook's galley," I replied. "Also saw Cushing on deck a few minutes ago."

"I don't like that fellow," he growled glumly. "I suspect him."

"Of what?" I inquired.

"Well—ulterior motives, I reckon. I'm off again. Got fifteen or twenty back-calls to make. These lazy, good-for-nothings say they'll be ready *pronto*, and then back they go to sleep again. I'm the party that'll roust 'em out, though, if I have to take a club. Let me know if Miss Vandiver shows up. So-long."

Coincident with his return on the next round-up, came Honk, triumphantly escort-

ing Watts, McMuir and Schweitzmeyer, filibusters three. Watts was the possessor of a badly scratched and bruised frontispiece and a broken finger, while the Teuton exhibited an eye draped in darkest mourning, and also an upper front tooth missing entirely.

"A deference of opinion," explained McMuir, noting my look of polite concern. "Twa fast rounds, but na harm done." He winked laboriously, and added in a loud aside: "I oompired the bout, and 'twas odds on the Dootchman till he lost his best bitin' tooth."

The working force now numbered seventy-six of the native contingent, perched on lumber piles and squatted in the offing, of which number seventy-five were smoking cigarettes, and the exception was on the verge of proving the rule if somebody would lend him the makings. Six white men added to that figure, brought the grand total up to eighty-two—which wasn't bad for a three-hours' muster.

"Now then," said Honk, sizing up the crowd, "I want ten men to accompany Watts and me, to drive grade stakes; we'll need at least one in the bunch that savvies English.

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How many of these fellows understand civilized language?" he asked Addicks.

"I'd say that a third of them do," was the reply. "*Hombres!* So many who *sabe* 'come here' step out and stand in line, will you!"

A score of the smokers moved forward and stood at attention.

"Good," said Honk. "I can express myself so much more quickly and to the point in the tongue of Shakespeare and William J. Bryan. Now, pay attention, if you please. I want you — and — you and you" — designating three who stood apart — "to pick five men each to chop a path through the jungle with axes, grubbing-hoes, and weed-scythes. Get that?"

"*Si, señor,*" said the recitation-class.

"No 'see, sinner,' about it. We're talking English now. Say 'yes, sir.'"

"Yess, sar," returned the three.

"That's better. So far, so good. Now, you two — and you — and you — come here! You'll take orders from this big man with the black eye; his name is Mr. Schweitzmeyer. Can you say that?" They rolled their eyes and made the sign of the cross. "Well, you can say 'mister,' anyway. He'll

have you pick out so many men to dig with picks and shovels; so many for the scrapers and to lay track; and the rest of you will do whatever he or I or somebody else orders 'em to do. Horace, how about the tools? Fit everybody out at once. And, Mac, you may help around wherever you find an opening until we need the engine to haul track materials. We'll have a track laid for you pretty shortly, if I mistake not."

"Don't forget Addicks," I interposed. "You've omitted him entirely."

"That's right, so I did. Come along with me, brother, if you like. I'll let you carry the chain for me through the tall uncut."

"Delighted," said Addicks, but he didn't look it. "Er—perhaps I'd better stay in hailing distance of town, though, for fear the—ahem!—in case Mrs. Brown or any of them should want to know something."

"Horace can attend to anything of that nature," said Honk. "He's the boy that can gossip with 'em, if they want to know anything."

Addicks stole a glance, heavy with ardent yearning, in the direction of the bay, and sighed like the fall of the year. I got an opportunity, when they were starting, to

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drop him a word of encouragement. "I'll keep cases on Cushing," I told him, "and if he attempts a single ulterior motive while you're gone, I'll squash him with no more compunction than I would have for a ring-necked willy-walloo bug. I'll watch him," said I, "like a hawk. One crook of his finger and I'll be astraddle of his neck."

He wrung my hand gratefully and hurried after the surveying-party. Two hundred yards away, he remembered something and galloped back—on foot.

"I just happened to think," he confided confidentially, "of course the party will come on shore this morning to see how everything's progressing. And if Miss—if any of 'em ask questions regarding me, I hope you'll kind of brag up my numerous accomplishments as much as you can without overdoing it. A quiet boost at the proper time," he said poetically, "has oftentimes healed a heart that's broken, and made a friend sincere."

"Sure," said I. "With the exception of 'Why should the spirit of mortal be proud?' that's the truest thing Ella Wheeler Wilcox ever wrote."

I don't let anybody throw a spell over me

with poetry. I'm a connoisseur in poetry.

Honk and his companions by that time had entered the tall grass and were lost to view. Only by steaming up considerably was Addicks enabled to follow them ere the vegetation readjusted itself and obliterated all trace of their passage through it. He, too, was swallowed up by the jungle—and I saw him no more.

As a matter of actuality, I did see the whole outfit many, many times afterward, Addicks especially, but the janitor where I lodge read that sentence, and insisted that the "I saw him no more" part was necessary to round it out properly.

"Sticking to the bare facts all the time," said he, "is the absolute dulllest thing in literature. You'll have to doctor up that there book a lot if you get anybody to read it through."

I hope no one will harbor the delusion that my duties were trivial and unimportant because I modestly refrain from beating on my chest and bellowing plaudits to my own prowess. I'd hate to have that idea gain credence, for I really was very essential to the scheme, you know. I had charge of the sinews of the struggle; I doled out the picks

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and shovels; and when somebody broke a scythe-blade trying to slice a nigger-head rock in half, I was the easy mark who supplied and superintended the fitting of a new blade to the old handle.

They came to me for everything, and in badly bent and twisted English asked for whetstones and matches and what time it was and if they might be excused to get a drink.

Atlaslike, I supported the entire responsibility of the proposition on my shoulders, at the same time knowing that, in all probability, Honk and Addicks would claim all the credit if it was a success, but blame me if it turned out a fizzle.

McMuir seemed to be drawing pay mainly for watching me work, so I ordered him to fire up the locomotive at once. But when she began to stink up the shed with an odor of fried crickets and boiling mildew, I had to go outside until he got her hot enough to move.

He then amused himself and the populace by clanking over to the wharf and back, whistling stock-warnings at grasshoppers and taking small, naked brownies by the dozen for a ride in the tank.

By ten o'clock railroad-building had certainly got off on the right foot in Santa Maria. During a momentary lull I straightened up, mopped my brow, took a chew, and remembered the minority stockholders. I thought it funny that they hadn't turned up. For people who insisted on doing things, they had very little respect for a time-clock, anyhow.

I climbed to a point of vantage in the shed, and subjected the Imogen to one of my haughtiest stares. I discovered, in some astonishment, that she had steam up. Smoke rolled from her black-and-white-striped funnel in a waving plume; and the tam-o'-shanter squad, stationed in readiness, apparently waited for a signal to heave anchor and hit the high places.

Ranged along the side fence where they had a good view of shore, stood the entire passenger-list of the yacht with all eyes busy scrutinizing the town through lorgnettes, opera-glasses, and binoculars. Something had engaged their attention, I gathered at once, but what was it? I tried to follow the direction of their gaze, as a person will unconsciously, by craning my neck trying to locate the object of their concentrated stares.

Nothing new, strange, or startling was in evidence anywhere. The town stood intact, untouched by sudden cataclysm or conflagration. Parrots were quarreling among the palms as usual. Here and there a wisp of smoke curled lazily from a mud-oven, or a fat *señora* dozed in the shadow of her wicki-up. The normal state of innocence reigned.

I marveled, nonplused. And when I marvel nonplused, I investigate.

I made a hasty descent from my perch, and sallied out to reconnoiter. If there was anything doing, I purposed getting in on it before the inquest was over, at any rate. But nothing appeared at close hand. Santa Maria was as calm and unruffled as a Sunday-school in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in the winter of 1641.

"Has anything of a catastrophous or calamitous nature happened — fire, earthquake, or tidal wave?" I inquired of a somnolent citizen.

"Ah, *señor*," he replied, with extravagant courtesy, "the extremity of the nothingness which has happened is of a truth stupendous. The excitement is of a most remarkable enormity lacking. But if the distinguished American *señor* would at a magnificent litter of woolly puppies be pleased to look —"

I pleaded the stress of unfinished business and continued on my way. On the silent and deserted wharf I leaned against a hitching-post for ships and again peered at the sextet of rubber-necks on board the yacht. Then I waved a flipper and made friendly signs.

Cushing replied by some unintelligible gesticulatory antics, and Mrs. Brown, I think it was, tried to megaphone an oral question between her hands. I sat on a coil of hempen hawser to signify that if they wished to *parlez vous* with me, I'd wait.

Then ensued a lively debate on deck, in which Miss Vandiver, as near as I could judge, and a lady I took to be her aunt, came within an ace of straining their friendly relations. After an interval, a temporary agreement was reached and a skiff was lowered. Cushing and Miss Vandiver boarded, and it pushed off. They called a halt fifty yards from the wharf, and Cushing spoke.

"What news?" he asked anxiously. "Is it settled?"

"Settled?" I echoed.


"Hasn't there been an uprising of some kind? We've been watching the rioting since early this morning from on board.

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We were afraid to risk coming ashore. They took possession of the property, didn't they? Looked like a thousand or more surrounding the buildings — and they've been racing back and forth for several hours with a locomotive loaded to the guards with people! What's happened?"

CHAPTER XII

THE DISAPPEARING RAILROAD

T was the beautiful and long-to-be-remembered opportunity of a lifetime to stuff Cushing and his fair companion full of wild, blood-curdling tales wherein our little handful of daredevils had been surrounded and beset by countless hordes of clamoring natives, and how we had killed and crippled them by hundreds until the ground got so slippery with gore that they couldn't stand up to fight any longer.

Looking back over my chance, now that it is too late, I am thrilled by the rare and delightful possibilities in the situation for a free-hand liar with a well-oiled imagination. But I handled it like a wool-gathering dub. I told the plain, sodden, humdrum, uneventful truth.

And I came very near having my word doubted, at that. It was a case of the truth being incompatible and incongruous — where fiction seemed the only honorable way out

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of it. I stuck to my story so tenaciously, however, commonplace and improbable though it must have sounded to them, that they finally gave me the benefit of the doubt, and paddled back to disillusion the rest of the bunch waiting breathlessly for details of the morning's horrors.

"Then we may come on shore in perfect safety," called Miss Vandiver, as they receded.

"Sure thing!" I shouted impatiently. "Bring your knitting, and stay over for supper, if you like."

It was a long time before she forgave me that remark. Cushing said she referred to me as "that fresh fat man" for weeks.

The whole party disembarked in a body soon after luncheon, and found the town, as I had promised, in a state of vast and lugubrious tranquillity. Once convinced that their suspicions were mere figments of a too vivid imagination, the ladies recovered their aggressiveness like a small boy safe inside his own yard with the gate shut.

Mrs. Brown demanded to be shown all over the workings instantly, and Mrs. Smith arrogantly criticized the cluttered condition of the tool house; even Mrs. Robison, hith-

erto inoffensive, called my attention to the fact that a "No Smoking" sign should be posted on all the buildings, including the engine-shed, without delay.

She said that she had lived in hourly dread of fire all her life, or something of the sort, to which I facetiously replied that my greatest distrust of fire was not confined wholly to this life, and was rewarded by a sniff for my effort to be agreeable.

Mrs. Beverly-Travis, whom I met for the first time, I felt a preference for at once. She was different. Personal attractiveness is largely a question of psychology, anyhow. I should say that Mrs. Beverly-Travis wasn't exactly so beautiful to look at as she was soothing and satisfying to the sensibilities. She was neither skinny nor stout, young nor old, light nor dark. A happy medium in height, weight, coloring, and temperament—enhanced by a pair of haunting hazel eyes and just the faintest, fleeting suggestion of sadness around the corners of her mouth.

Owing to the importunities of Mrs. Brown-Smith-Robison, et al., I found it impossible to make a complete psychological analysis of Mrs. B.-T. at that time. My

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thinkabus was kept on the jump trying to answer questions at the rate of three per second and keep up a running fire of quip and epigram, as is my custom, at the same time.

That sort of thing, long-drawn-out, is wearisome to the mentality, too; discrepancies and contradictions then creep in—whereupon the obliging purveyor of knowledge is straightway called a willful deceiver or an egregious fool, or both, as a partial reward for all his painstaking.

Nevertheless, I led the whilom delvers into practical railroad construction a merry chase that afternoon, through weed-patch and coppice, dell and ravine. Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Smith, who carried several pounds excess avoirdupois for extended footwork, mopped off the condensed steam from time to time and worked a trifle heavy at the exhaust; the other four burned less fuel, but with flat-wheels and one thing or another, made no better showing on the grades.

Schweitzmeyer's black-and-tan cohorts were making headway, all right, under the stern surveillance of his one good eye; and the loss of his front tooth, if anything, facilitated his roars of invective and command.

"Such a rude, big, brutal person! My!" said Mrs. Robison. "Is he necessary?"

"Very necessary," I assured her. "You see, the men respect and obey him. He obtains twice the work for the same wage that a meek, under-sized, soft-spoken boss would under similar conditions."

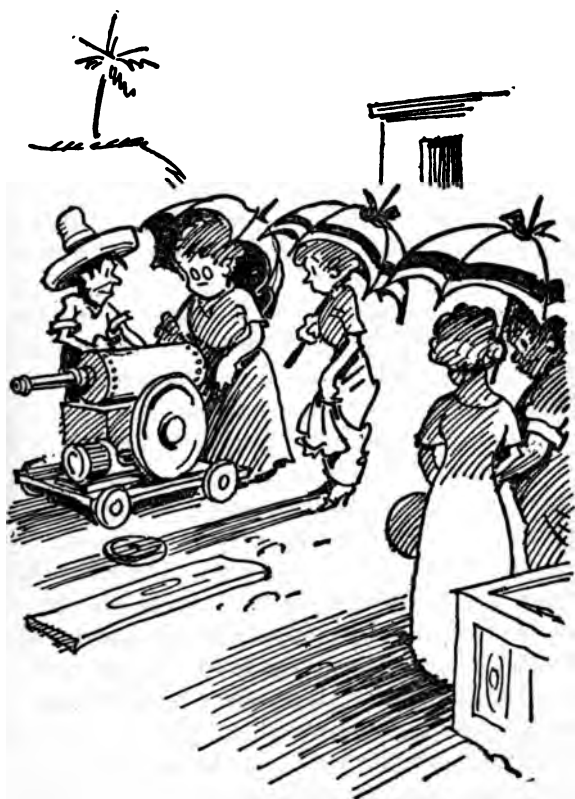
"I want to know!" swore Mrs. Brown. "I do not agree with you. I shall speak to the man himself about it. Have him come here at once, please."

I conveyed the invitation to Schweitzmeyer. He came, red, perspiring, and battle-scarred.

"My dear sir," she said loftily. "The necessity for high-pitched or violent and unseemly language while engaged in the directing of these gentlemen"—waving a hand to indicate the cigarette-smokers peering from the adjacent thickets—"is not apparent. It must be discontinued."

"Dot iss righdt," agreed Schweitzmeyer uncomprehendingly. "I haf said it myself a goot many times yet. I won't haf it. No. It iss a pad bizness."

"You may go," said Mrs. Brown, kindly. "I knew you would understand. Thank you."



“Took a look at the formaldehyde blow-gun.”

I followed the perplexed Teuton a little way.

"But!" said he huskily. "Vat dit she vant, you t'ink?"

"She likes your work," I explained. "She was complimenting you."

Schweitzmeyer went back to his task with renewed enthusiasm. There was an outburst presently that made zigzag indentations in the welkin.

"There," commented Mrs. Brown complacently. "You see? My little lecture did him good. He is much more gentle and forbearing with the workingmen."

With which highly satisfactory view of the matter everybody coincided, and we thereupon retraced our steps to the bungalow.

The party nosed into a few of Honk's mechanical trinkets, took a look at the formaldehyde blow-gun, and had it explained exhaustively, after which they thought they'd better be going. Said Mrs. Brown, at the moment of departure:

"I presume Mr. Simpson and Mr. Addicks will return before nightfall. We shall be pleased to welcome you gentlemen on board the yacht for dinner this evening. We can

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discuss the work at length. We dine at seven. I think, Archie," she added, "you had better lower one of the launches when we return—or, perhaps, both. They will be useful for running back and forth."

"Or you might warp the Imogen alongside the dock," I suggested.

"Oh, dear no!" said Mrs. Robison nervously. "I should never sleep a wink nights if that were done. We might all be murdered in our beds."

Honk and his staff returned from afield shortly before sundown. He was in a jubilant frame of mind. Addicks, however, stiff and leg-weary from unwonted exertions, seemed low-spirited.

"Well," boasted Honk, "we staked off five miles of the right-of-way to-day. Guess that ain't going some, people!"

I mentioned that we were all invited out to dinner.

Addicks did not appear remarkably enthusiastic. He sighed instead. He still looked fagged out and as friendless as a lost dog, after having bathed and changed clothes. I felt sympathetic.

"Oh, by the way," said I airily. "I know some people who have been very much

concerned about you to-day. I've been singing your praises. They're very noticeably impressed, I think."

I thought I'd make it count while I was at it. In the fabricating game one shouldn't be afraid of a blue-sky limit.

"Is she, honest?" he exclaimed, all atremble.

"Is she honest? Well, I hope so, I'm sure. Have you missed anything?"

"You know what I mean. Was she much interested? What all did she ask about me? Did you—did she—tell me about it."

"Was she much interested? What did she ask about you? Oh, my dear sir! I've been busy all afternoon answering questions about you," I lied glibly. "It was, 'What does Mr. Addicks think of so-and-so?' 'What is Mr. Addicks' first name?' 'Is Mr. Addicks this, and is he that?' 'And isn't he a handsome man?' Why, my friend, it was positively undignified the way she catechized me."

Addicks soared from sea-level to the dizzy heights of cloudland in one sustained flight. Fatigue, soreness, insect-bites, and brier-scratches were as never was, so potent is the force of that all-pervading emotion,

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the inexplicable preference of a man for one certain female creature chosen from the teeming multitude and set up as a divinity, preëminent and omnibeauteous.

I must admit that I can't fathom the thing quite.

But, reverting to the dinner on board the Imogen, there was logic in that.

Maudlin sentiment may sway us, as the willows bow and bend before the leveling sweep of the storm; the frenzied ardor of religion, of politics, of war—or a thousand and one other moving passions—may be certain to overwhelm and intoxicate us.

With torn and blistered feet we may tread the brambly thickets or climb the stony slopes in pursuit of the iridescent bubble of Fortune; we may run atilt in the lists of Love, be consumed by the fires of Ambition, or be blown up in a premature explosion of Pride; but, take it all in all, an invitation to eat, when you are comfortably hungry, is the one sane and consistent proposition in life.

Nor am I, personally, exacting or inclined to fault-finding at table. A slab or two of meat, flanked by various vegetables in season, gravy, bread, pie or pudding, and a

pot of coffee, followed by a pipe or cigarette, suffices for me nicely—and many thanks for the same.

The finer delicacies and epicurean tit-bits sought by gastromaniacs, such as milk-fed lobster à la Newport and broiled humming bird stuffed with honey and grated chestnuts, with sauce of attar of roses, and caviar salad garnished with orchids—that kind of truck appeals to Honk. But not for fair Rosamond! I'll take ham-shank and cereals for mine.

We made the gas-launch punctually at six-thirty, and were filliped on board the Imogen in the fraction of a jiffy. I, for one, felt all suffused with anticipation. And to think how we were tricked! I believe I can cover the whole assignment in a paragraph or two.

We sat down expectantly at the table in the grand salon—or is it saloon? A velvet-footed waiter brought pea soup in diminutive bowls. It was excellent pea soup, only the bowl was too small for the pea, so they left it out. We ate that. I think the fish came next—a planked sardine divided into ninths. S-sl-lp!

Then a very small but perfectly formed

duck about the size of a sparrow was placed before Archie, who carved it into tiny portions and doled out one atom to each person present. We composed ourselves, and each swallowed his bite of duck. I came very near overlooking a pinch of dressing that had been placed on my plate alongside the fowl.

After that surfeit of meat we had a creamed onion à la Lilliput, a small baked spud en petite, and, lastly, a strawberry ice and a ladyfinger.

Dinner was over. But, man! It had been some display of napery and silver!

All hands then piped on deck, where smoking was permissible, and the conversation turned to the discussion of business, underneath the silver crescent of a fine new moon.

Honk, radiating optimism like an electric heater, made extravagant predictions about what might be expected within sixty days, to say nothing of thirty, thereby making a prodigious hit with Mrs. Brown-Smith-Robison. I passed the time of day with Aunt Beverly-Travis while this was going on. We talked about Chicago and hay fever and the Panama Canal, and she asked me if I had ever spent a summer at Petoskey, Michigan.

Addicks actually inveigled Miss Vandiver to the rail, where they pecked over at the reflections of stars in the water, and once Addicks laughed aloud—probably at one of his own witticisms.

Just before our welcome expired we aufwiedersehened and skip-to-malooed (a Norse expression meaning “buoyant with hunger Ludwig muttered his adieus and biplaned for the nearest eating-house.”) Meanwhile our train of thought had pulled out without us, as usual.

A hundred new recruits, and most of the old ones, presented themselves for jobs in the morning. Word had gone forth from hand to mouth that the *gringoes* were scattering easy money, a commodity which all the world loves. I broke open a few more caddies of grubbing-hoes and pickaxes, and fitted out all comers.

A goodly throng responded to Schweitzmeyer's stentorian directorate. That day, and the next, the right-of-way was cut for many rods deeper into the jungle, and the grading-gang smoothed up a considerable stretch of road-bed ahead of the track-layers. Honk was one large smirk of satisfaction when he viewed the progress made at nightfall.

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But the spirit of mischief returned from a brief vacation and took hold with renewed vigor at this juncture.

A cloud about the size of a sofa-pillow frolicked up one evening, and a nice tropical shower of some six or eight inches of rain fell in an hour's time. The sun came back on the job promptly next day, and, though still too wet to resume railroad building, it was fine weather for Turkish bathing. A hot steam pervaded the earth and the fulness thereof. It was a lovely, growing day. Grass, weeds, and small vegetation grew high as your head in a few minutes; saplings swelled into trees before your eyes; brier-bushes, creepers, vines, moss, and ferns filled up the interstices almost before you could say "Scat!"

Our neatly cleared right-of-way disappeared as if it had been painted off the canvas with one swipe of green paint. In a single day a towering tangle of bamboo, mangrove, mesquit, and a thousand varieties of orchestral palms, rubber-plants, and palmettos obliterated all trace of the project.

Honk and I forced a passage for a short distance into it, and actually found grade-stakes, driven two days before, that had

sprouted shoots ten feet high with leaves as big as a mains'l. My poor friend drooped like a willow-plume, so deeply was he knifed by the sudden disappearance of his beloved railroad.

I flew angry—with everything. Especially Stringfellow and his associate tricksters. I burst into audible speech.

"They laughed at us the day we sailed!" I complained bitterly. "You may remember they offered us five thousand extra if we finished this railroad in six months—and then they mocked us! This thing is a farce—a rotten, pusillanimous, diabolical fiasco! And these women—pah! What are they going to accomplish? Nothing—and not much of that! What we ought to do would be to dynamite all of the buildings, set fire to the docks, and go home! Back to the good old United States!"

"The British built the Uganda Railway under much the same conditions," mused Honk abstractedly. "And what one Anglo-Saxon can do, why not another? There ought to be a solution to the—to the—What's that on your leg, Horace? A snake!"

Naturally, I felt a desire to describe a

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parabola through the air at the bare mention of the word "snake." I have no use for snakes in my business. But I found myself literally rooted to the spot. Not by the invidious embrace of a serpent, fortunately, but by a clinging creeper which was climbing unconcernedly up my leg.

"Well, by grab!" I exploded. "What do you know about that? Let me borrow your machete, please —"

Honk leaned against a mammoth fern frond and scratched his dome thoughtfully.

"Aha!" he said, just as I finished hacking my way to freedom. "I've got it! Hooray!" and off he crashed like a wounded stag through the thicket in the direction of Santa Maria.

CHAPTER XIII

MAKING OLD SOL WORK

HONK'S sudden outburst indicated one of two things; either his mental hairspring had slipped out of kelter, or else he had secured his famous toe-hold on the problem, and a victory was but a question of minutes. Which or t'other, my place was unquestionably by his side.

When I came up, a bit winded and considerably scratched, I found Honk outside the bungalow, feverishly resolving the sun-motor into a jumble of detached pieces.

"Taking the motor apart?" I asked breathlessly.

"Certainly not!" he returned with fine sarcasm. "I'm demonstrating a new hair tonic that removes dandruff from cabbage-heads."

I withheld judgment as to the exact state of his mental equilibrium. Genius and bats-in-the-belfry are so nearly alike to all outward appearances that the amateur alienist

will do well to proceed slowly. If the suspect presently springs a scientific sensation of some sort, or demonstrates some hitherto impossible mechanical marvel, he is a genius. Congratulate him. But if, on the other hand, he dons a chaplet of dog-fennel blossoms and weeps because he has no monkey-wrench with which to unfasten his shoulder-blades—assuring you that the same need sharpening—call a cop! The guy is nutty.

I waited watchfully.

“Oh, by the way,” he remarked presently, “I must tell you about my heaven-born idea, Horace. As you are aware, the tropical growth of vegetation has blocked us completely with the railroad work. All right; the thing to do is to go after the aforesaid vegetation. Chopping, mowing, or cutting it down by main strength and awkwardness won’t do, because the first time it happens to rain the stuff will sprout up again, ranker than ever. The problem demands the application of brains, not brawn. Fortunately, we have plenty of the former commodity on the job—I being here, in full possession of my faculties. All right, again. There is an old saying that ‘necessity is the mother of invention.’ You’ll admit the ne-

cessity—I am happy to announce the invention.”

“How sweet!” I murmured. “Where in thunder is it?”

“These lenses,” he continued pleasantly, “we will arrange as a burning-glass, to prove the proposition on a small scale, you understand. By concentrating the sun’s rays on a given spot the desired result will be obtained, thusly: first, all moisture is dispelled by evaporation; second, the vegetation bursts into flame and is consumed; third, by directing an intense heat of, say, five or six hundred degrees against the soil, the same is converted into a brick to the depth of three, six, or even ten inches, if we so desire. All we’ll have to do, after we have burned off a right-of-way, will be to level our track-bed and turn it into a solid brick a hundred yards wide and fifty miles long. Simple, isn’t it?”

“I’ll have to make a flying trip to the States to get the big lenses that will be required. I’ll borrow the Imogen from Cushing—I believe he said she was capable of fifteen knots in an emergency. While I’m gone you may—” whereupon he deluged me with instructions I forgot before he had finished telling them.

"But why," I marveled, "if it will require a larger apparatus to do the actual work, are you monkeying with this toy thing?"

"To convince the management," he said shortly. "Nothing like ocular proof; especially when they've become suspicious of everybody." A statement that had all the earmarks of sound logic.

An hour sufficed to bring everything to a satisfactory state of turmoil and mutual misunderstanding. Honk sent a hasty messenger to call a directors' meeting, before which, when assembled, he made an impassioned speech and, for exhibition purposes, wound up by baking a brick walk across our finest lawn.

In the fluster of enthusiasm that followed, Honk packed a grip and had everything arranged for his trip before Mrs. Brown got her glasses polished so she could see what was happening. It was eight-cylinder work throughout. Miss Vandiver, Aunt Bev, and Cushing decided to stop off in Santa Maria, but Mrs. Robison declared that she wouldn't stay overnight among treacherous foreigners for a dollar a minute. So Honk took the trio of older ladies with him.

Just as the town clock—if there had been

one — struck three in the afternoon the Imogen, in a halo of smoke, and shoving a huge bow-wave ahead of her, left the harbor and pointed her aristocratic nose toward the north.

"Now, I s'pose we've got to sit around in sodden inertia till he returns," remarked Addicks, who stood beside me. "Isn't there anything we can do to keep the time from hanging like an incubus around our necks?"

"Every year," said I reminiscently, "we run across fellows who loll in their hammocks under the orange-trees and are seemingly content to take their sluggish ease. But, exposed to our galvanic influence, they first prick up their ears, then they begin to sidle and curvet, and finally" — I smiled indulgently — "they may be seen rearing and snorting and champing the bits. It is the power of mind over matter," I averred. "*Beano*, my friend, take it easy."

"I shall go pay my respects to Miss Vandiver," he replied, and he struck off at a fox-trot for the Fonda Maxima, the two-story hostelry that had been selected by the ladies for their place of abode. It was a ten minutes' walk.

Half an hour later he awoke me, in my

hammock under the coconut bushes, for the purpose of telling me his troubles. Heigh-ho, this world is surely a wilderness of woe!

"That fellow Cushing was with her on the hotel veranda," he complained peevishly. "They were sitting together on a settee! Mrs. Beverly-Travis, I believe, was taking a snooze in her room. Don't you think it is rather—er—indiscreet for Miss Vandiver to sit with that Cushing alone?"

"Ahr-r-wahr-hum!" I yawned. "In broad daylight—on the hotel veranda, did you say? Nup, my friend; I must confess that I see nothing contradistinctive to the conventions or marring to the escutcheon of good manners in what you describe. Why didn't you make 'em shove over and sit down on the other side of her yourself, if you felt so disreputable about it?"

"What? Inflict myself on a young lady, like a common boor? No, sir, I'm not that sort. But I do think Miss Vandiver ought to be protected from the silly blandishments of that pink-and-white nincompoop of a Cushing. He hasn't an idea in his head. Intellectually, he is an absolute blank. He's the superlative of a mental nothing reduced

to infinity! But he's got the brazen cheek of—"

I deemed it time to sit up. There was no knowing to what frenzy of incoherent ravings this tirade might ultimately lead—so befuddled becomes the imagination when infected by the germ of jealous rage. I gave him a homeopathic treatment.

"Pick a row with the man," I suggested bloodthirstily. "Then challenge him to fight. I'll be glad to act as your second and make all the arrangements. Pistols at twenty paces at daybreak Sunday, back of the ice-plant. Are you a good shot? Maybe you would prefer swords."

"Forget it, forget it!" he advised. "The age of the duello is past. We have more refined and subtle ways of disposing of our enemies now, at the same time eliminating the element of personal risk. Nowadays we defeat 'em by brain, instead of brawn."

It was the second time I'd heard that brain-brawn joke in a single day.

"For instance, typhoid germs in his lemonade, eh?" said I, leering in a correct imitation of the old hag in the sub-cellar. "Or take him out boat-riding, and have a shark get him. He! He!" I cachinnated in the regulation cracked voice.

"You have the instincts of a tent-show-man," said Addicks disgustedly. "Duels! Typhoid germs! Sharks! Ugh! Turn over, *amigo*; your dreams are troubled!"

He rose moodily and stalked in the direction of the adjacent *pulperia*—forgetting, in his abstraction, to invite me to accompany him. I saw him again while at supper in the restaurant. He seemed mildly exalted spiritual—or, rather, spirituously. He sat down at my table.

"Got the whole thing figured out since I saw you," he said with an air of finality. "To-morrow we go to Los Cocos, which, as you know, will at some future date yet to be determined mark the other end of this hot brick railroad of ours. Company needs to establish an office at Los Cocos—see? Ought to get options on rubber and coffee lands, and all that sort of thing. Need a representative there permanently, y' know. Be on the ground to hustle business, and be all ready for us when the railroad's finished. We'll take Cushing with us."

I saw at once the fiendish purpose underlying his apparently careless words. I sat shocked and appalled at the calm, deliberate, debonnair ferocity of the man. His inten-

tions were to ditch Cushing in this deadly dull and stupid village of Los Cocos, fifty miles from nowhere, and long deceased and buried deep in the dark bowels of the jungle. To maroon and desert the luckless victim in this spot, far from every creature comfort in life—where one day followed another in an endless succession, a dreary and monotonous routine of nothing to do—it was indeed the sublimated refinement of cruelty.

I stifled my feelings with an effort and swallowed my fourth egg.

"Start about seven, I reckon?" I said evenly. He nodded.

I expressed the opinion that, barring unforeseen accidents, I'd almost guarantee my prompt attendance at the hour agreed upon.

"Have you mentioned the matter to Cushing?" I asked.

"Sure. He's tickled to death to get to go. He thinks he can pick up some easy money in hardwoods on the side. I made it as attractive as possible."


At the last minute, as it chanced, I reconsidered my decision and gave up the trip. A fifty-mile grill on muleback, with nothing at the end to divert one was too much of a good thing, all at one sitting. If I might

have aided or abetted the mission in any way, 'twould have been different; but Addicks was fully equal to all and sundry emergencies; besides, it was his intrigue, not mine.

The unsuspecting victim, Cushing, was agog with impatience to be off. I wished them all manner of luck and sought my hammock among the nodding palm-leaf fans.

CHAPTER XIV

TUTTLE AND HIS ULTIMATUM

ITH Honk and the three ringleaders in the activities far away on the bounding waves, Addicks gone on a four days' trip into the interior with Cushing, and Watts, McMuir, and Schweitzmeyer playing pinochle in the engine-shed, I anticipated a reasonable interval of much-needed relaxation.

But my pleasant predilections were short-lived. Miss Vandiver and Aunt Bev.-Trav. routed me out within two hours, and unanimously voted me the unenviable (to me) distinction of being their guide, mentor, and escort to all points of interest within a radius of five miles. A thankless task.

Not only did they monopolize my valuable time and powers of graphic delineation, but they allowed me to spend my hard-earned money for diligence-hire, and forced me to listen to their insipid prattle about the "old-world romanticness" and "poetic

beauties of the lotus-land" by the hour, a proceeding inconceivably tiresome.

Addicks returned the fourth day as scheduled. He said he had left Cushing at Los Cocos, enthusiastically in charge. The same day we despatched to him by courier a crate of carrier-pigeons, "to enable the fellow to communicate with us in case anything happens," Addicks said with a dry laugh. I surrendered my official position as errand-boy and companion to the ladies almost before Addicks alighted from his mule.

Addicks, if he behaves himself and does unto others as they think he ought for several years longer, may be allowed to pass through the pearly gates to Elysium—but the thrill will be lacking. He tasted the joys of paradise when he took over the job of fetching and toting for Miss Vandiver and Aunt Bev.

But what must he do then but act like a dying calf and moon around until they came within whispering distance of attaching the tin cannister to him for keeps. It was Mrs. Beverly-Travis who gave me an inkling of his raw work.

"My niece admires Mr. Addicks very much at times," she told me, "but his moods

frighten her. Now and then he becomes positively saturnine, and his black eyes shine in the twilight like a cat's. O-o! He seems oppressed by some terrible secret. I wonder if he has ever killed anyone—"

"S-h!" said I mysteriously. "He once made the race for governor of Arkansas, and contracted the ague while canvassing in the swamps. It settled in his feet; he has chilblains. For all that, he's as harmless as a kitten. Why," I assured her, "you'd be surprised how tender-hearted he is. He'd cry his eyes out if he thought you were displeased with him. I'll speak to him about it."

I did so at the first opportunity.

"My love-lorn friend," said I, "you'll have to cut out the sick-dog tactics with Miss Vandiver and be playful. Perk up and caper a little, you know. Scatter some sunshine and pluck a few posies of humor from the roadside while on the way to the cemetery. Of course, we all have to marry sooner or later, but there's no use letting it overshadow our lives beforehand. Cheer up and be a sport!"

He denied the allegations, but went away thoughtful.

A pigeon from Cushing arrived at five o'clock. He reported everything absolutely quiet in Los Cocos, and hoped the Imogen had returned safely. This reminded me to get out the telescope and sweep the horizon for smoke. Three points abaft of nor' by nor'east I thought I detected a faint smudge, but it turned out to be a fingerprint on the glass. S'death!

At a quarter to seven the Imogen slipped into the bay from around the point. I suppose they came down the coast to surprise us. They did it, anyhow.

Honk disembarked with the pompous air of the old *conquistadors* when they hopped off and claimed all the land "that the waters of the sea may now wash or henceforth—forever!" Addicks and I met him at the wharf as a kind of committee of welcome. He greeted us genially, but walked wide out and somewhat stiffly on the way up-town—like he was there merely to look over the place while waiting for a few worlds to whirl up and be conquered.

"Geel!" I remarked to Addicks in a loud aside. "Isn't he proud, though? Must have heard somebody complimenting him by mistake."

"Must have," Addicks agreed. "We'll be obliged to take him down the line with a few hands at pitch, don't you think?"

Honk unbent the fraction of an inch.

"Oh, slush!" he exclaimed. "Are you two trying to poke persiflage at me? Ha! I'll have you both fired first thing in the morning. Would it interest you to know that with Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Smith, and Mrs. Robison my slightest wish is inexorable law? I am IT with them."

"Marvelous!" I commented. "Yet it might have been expected. You were always irresistible to women."

Honk is very touchy on that particular subject. He hastened to steer the confab into safer channels.

"Say, you chaps" — he dropped his pomposity as one chucks away the stump of an unsatisfactory cigar — "those ladies have the mazuma, all right. How much money do you reckon they brought back with 'em — letters of credit, cashiers' checks, and the actual coin? A quarter of a million, if a cent. And they assured me that there was plenty more obtainable, if needed. They mean business.

"But, ah! — wait till we get our sunshine

concentrator in action! You'll see something doing in the way of jungle-clearing, I'll promise you. We got lenses six feet across," he went on graphically. "Four of 'em. Cost two thousand apiece—but Mrs. Brown didn't hesitate a second! 'We'll take four,' she said. 'I believe you needed four, did you not, Mr. Simpson?' 'Correct,' said I. We stood over the men while they were making them to see that it was done right. Mrs. Brown is a brick. Also Mrs. Smith, and, likewise, Mrs. Robison. Expense has no terrors for them. They're after results.

"By the way, whom do you think I saw in New Orleans the day before we started back? Give a guess, Horace."

"Billbro," said I. "No? Then Stringfellow? Butch Pottet? Mr. Skygack—"

"No. It was no other than Captain Walter Toomey."

"A true specimen of alley-goat," I commented fervently.

"He told me he was doing coastwise freighting and all kinds of odd jobs with the Belle of the South to make expenses. Stringfellow's instructions, he said. I ordered him to report here at once with the ship."

"Did he say he would?" asked Addicks.

"Well — er — he said he'd do as he whang-bang pleased about that. A most disagreeable and uncouth ruffian he is, to my notion. I hope some day to see him in a nice little iron compartment with a grating on the door, where he belongs."

If it were advisable I could give you a long-drawn, technical description of the burning-glasses as set up in battle array the following morning, for I have all the dope in Honk's handwriting, with diagrams and everything. To guard against such dangerous data falling into the hands of unscrupulous or irresponsible persons, Honk thinks we ought to suppress these details.

This determination was strengthened by the fact that our landlady's first-born, a freckled imp of ten, surreptitiously studied the notes the other day, and straightaway built a burning-glass of his grandmama's spectacles and the crystals from his father's and another boarder's watches. He then disposed of the vegetable garden in the back yard, replacing it with an inch of well-baked brick-crust, broiled the family cat where it lay, converted the week's wash hanging on the line into a wind-driven cloud of

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charred fragments, and had just trained his apparatus on the barn across the alley when a heavy hand overtook and arrested him.

The public cares nothing for Causes, anyhow. The things that count are Effects.

Addicks mobilized his nut-brown army by appointment at an early hour in the morning. Honk's apparatus was rushed ashore, set up on a flat car, and pushed ahead of Mac's engine straight into the heart of the tangled forest. A very few minutes served to establish indisputable proof of its utility. It did the work.

Silently at first—the luxuriant weed-growth, the matted grass, the spreading riot of frond, shoot, stem, and vine trembled, shriveled, and curled; then a crackling and popping, and the loud odor of something scorching; and, lastly, the roar of a conflagration.

The prowling spectral hound, Mischance, long attendant upon our movements, threw up its hands in acknowledgment of defeat, and, with tail between its legs, winged its flight heavily toward the dark, submarine caverns, where it nested with its vile brood!

The method of procedure was, nevertheless, absurdly simple. A path was burned

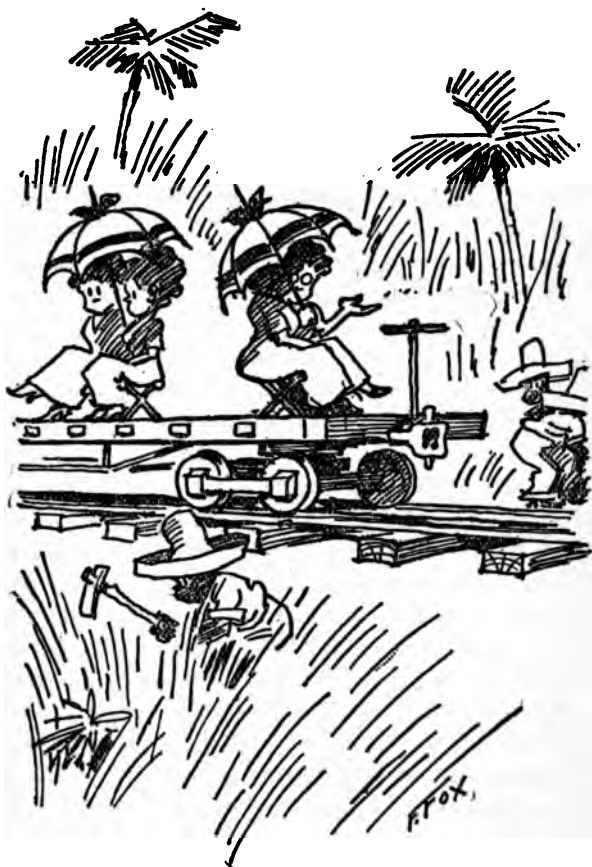
for a distance of, say, fifty yards, of width sufficient to accommodate the track; the gang would hop in and level off the bumps; Honk would bake same into a large seamless brick; the track-layers would then slap down fifty yards of track.

While this was being done Honk had time to back off a ways, and finish cleaning and surfacing the rest of the right-of-way on either side for a distance of a hundred feet or so.

A mile of first-class road-bed was finished up all fine and dandy the first day.

At five-thirty a pigeon arrived, bearing a message from Los Cocos, forty-nine miles distant. Cushing reported that nothing of importance had happened in that busy mart for twenty-four hours preceding, but that there was talk of a cock-fight in three weeks, if the weather permitted. He said he was well, and hoped—but of that, more anon, as Xantippe used to say to Socrates.

The railroad rolled steadily forward, mile after mile, into the delirium tremens woods, over fill and through cut, across ravine and around uplift, with the rhythmic, ceaseless, mechanical precision of martial music played on a drum.



*“Mrs. Brown et al., et cetera, rode back and forth
daily on the flat car.”*

Soon fifteen miles of perfect track lay basking in the sun. Then twenty—twenty-five. Mrs. Brown et al., et cetera, rode back and forth daily on the flat car, seated on camp-stools and holding sunshades over themselves, while Honk, sweating and par-boiled to a rich, dark, wine color, seared and burned his way ever onward, driving the spigot deeper and deeper into the honey-cask.

One night we heard a disturbance in the harbor. Subsequently events disclosed that the Belle of the South, Captain Toomey commanding, had arrived and dropped anchor. Captain Toomey came off in person at his convenience, which was about midway of the forenoon. Addicks, Mrs. Brown, Miss Vandiver, and myself were arranging a classified list of banana plantations round about Santa Maria, in the bungalow office, when the captain stamped in. He eyed us with a kind of calculating malevolence.

"Good morning, captain," said I affably. "Take a chair, and have off your cap."

"Umph, I don't care to," he returned gruffly. "I came up the coast last night. Thought I'd stop. What's going on here?"

"My dear captain," I effused, "it would

take a week to tell you, en toto, all that's going on in these parts. Things are booming."

"They are, eh? I hadn't heard that the work had been ordered started again. The owners were in Buenos Ayres a couple o' weeks ago. I saw the yacht there. Who's making things boom here—tell me that!"

"Ah, my admirable captain," said I, "we're under new management—"

"By the way," interposed Addicks, "are you carrying cargo?"

"I am not," said Captain Toomey shortly.

"Then we'll do well to begin fruit shipments at once," Addicks remarked, turning to Mrs. Brown. "Put the Belle of the South in commission for our business as soon as possible."

Toomey glared, and the bristles rose on the back of his neck. "There'll be no fruit shipped on my steamer," he snapped, "unless you pay regular rates in advance. I'll tell you that right now!"

"Do I understand that the vessel is the property of the H. T. P. Company?" inquired Mrs. Brown impatiently.

"It is," replied Addicks.

"Then what's all this foolishness about

rates? Who does this man think he is, pray? Certainly we shall take charge of the ship at once!"

Captain Toomey started for the door.

"Here, sir!" the lady called sharply. "Where are you going, please?"

"Where am I going?" The captain paused irately. "By the great—ahem! That, ma'am, is my business! I'll give you fair warning, though, that I shall cable to Mr. Stringfellow, and then I shall take my ship out of this harbor inside of an hour, ma'am! There's crooked work going on here!"

With which trenchant outburst he cuffed his cap to a more devil-may-care angle and stalked angrily from our presence. Miss Vandiver sank into a chair and evinced symptoms of extreme nervousness. She even whimpered a little, and said, "Oh, dear!" twice.

Addicks leaped for the stairs, down which he clattered three steps at a time. Gaining the open air by a side exit, he struck off toward the down-town district at a swinging trot. I lumbered into action more deliberately, but with no less a grasp on the exact situation.

"I'll slip across to the telegraph-office,"

said I, "and see what's doing. A five-case note, I think, will be adequate to suppress this cablegram, Mrs. Brown — if — ah, thank you! I'll attend to it at once."

"Come, Frances!" boomed Mrs. Brown militantly. "The launch will convey us out, and I will take charge of that Belle of the South ship myself. We'll see whether this swaggering Captain What's-his-name takes the property of our company and leaves with it, willy-nilly, in an hour!"

Yet for all that, everything was over but the congratulations when I reached the stage entrance, so to speak. A block from the *oficio telegrafos* I met Addicks.

"You're too late to see the fun," he drawled. "Our good friend Captain Toomey was just now arrested by the *guardacostas* and placed in *la calaboz*a for safe-keeping. The charge, I understand, was—let me see! Smuggling without *un permiso*, I think."

"And the cablegram?"

"Probably will be delayed," he said. "But no matter, 'twill keep."

When Honk heard of the incident that evening, he seemed disposed to criticize what he was pleased to call our high-handed

method with Captain Toomey. Not from any friendly regard he cherished for the uncouth mariner, but from the fact that we needed the man, if his services could have been enlisted.

"How'll you navigate the ship without a chief officer?" Honk asked. "It'll take two or three weeks at least to find a man. Time wasted, when a little judicious persuasion would have done the work with Toomey in ten minutes. You fellows are hopeless amateurs."

"Not!" said I. "Captain Toomey is a bull-head of the first magnitude. I've heard you yourself say that you hoped some day to see him behind a grating where he belongs. If you'd like to take a peep, you'll find him four blocks north and three west, in the white building to your right.

"As regards a new incumbent for the vacancy—I can secure a master of craft for the Belle of the South by noon to-morrow," I asserted boldly.

"Yes, you can! Who?"

"Captain Edgebert Tuttle, bugologist," said I.

He found no words on the tip of his tongue to meet that sally. Later, however, he said

that the whole matter was up to Addicks and me, and that it was manifestly none of his affair whatsoever.

Jumping lightly from pillar to post, I'll say that Addicks and I handled the proposition very neatly and diplomatically—if the extremely delicate and fragile nature of the negotiations are taken into consideration. Complexities arose.

Mrs. Brown and Miss Vandiver captured the ship. It is true that there was a slight show of resistance, notably in the culinary department, when invaded by sniffing interlopers. However, quick footwork saved the cook from Mrs. Brown's clutches.

After the first mate had been docked for what he had coming in wages and fired, martial law was declared on board. The second mate, discovered sick with some sort of chromatic fever—yellow, black, or scarlet—was hustled into quarantine. Then ensued a sweeping clean-up.

While this was going on, Addicks and I motored out, via muleback, to propose certain maritime proposals to Tuttle. We had a twelve-hour session after we got there. The mention of Stringfellow's name started fireworks; when we further complicated mat-

ters by the introduction of the ladies — “despised members of a lying and deceitful sex, sir!” — the tempest raged.

Six separate and distinct times during the day our hair-triggered host shot up into the air and detonated with a loud report, saying that he’d have nothing positively to do with the affair — at which we smiled indulgently and began again. The poet who said, “Oh, persistency, thou art a jeweler!” was a wise owl.

We kept on. At eight in the evening our man began sparring for wind, talking about revenge being sweet, and so on — and then we bagged him.

He agreed to take command of the ship — on condition that no one of the women should ever come near or personally address him. He preferred, if it were possible, never to see them even at a distance. If they’d agree to keep away — any business could be transacted by written instruction or messenger — well and good.

“I make this sacrifice, you understand, gentlemen, not from any desire to assist these women, but wholly in order to help outwit that arch-villain, Stringfellow, through whom, indirectly, I may be able to bring a fleeting pang of disappointment

to the sordid and purse-proud soul of the woman he calls his wife. The gratification of causing one moment's annoyance to Marian Segrist would amply repay me for my trouble."

His point of view seemed to me highly melodramatic. To my notion, it was all a lot of cackle over a mighty small egg, as I've heard my grandmother say. However, it requires all sorts of people to make an anthropology. We promised to notify him by return mule the next day, if the parties of the other part agreed to the conditions imposed, and bade him good notches.

Strange to say, Mrs. Brown heard our story without comment until everything to the smallest detail of intimate personal history had been recounted. I grew enthusiastic with the recital. With vibrating silver tongue I laid Tuttle's bleeding heart, all bent and cracked in a dozen different places, before her. I pictured him alone in his wilderness home—save for Esteban and his phonograph and a million or so lepidopters, etc.,—with the gnawing worm of unrequited affection burrowing ever deeper and deeper into his gizzard and other vitals, year after year. I limned with deft strokes on the

canvas of fancy a lifelike picture of his wrecked career, his squashed hopes, his —
ahem!


“Tuttle — Tuttle, you say?” mused Mrs. Brown. “The name is a very ordinary one. Do you know his Christian name?”

“Edgebert,” I replied.

“Humph! He is a fool. I should enjoy giving him a sound talking to. But, if he insists on it, let him have his way. We will not trouble him. You may tell him from me that if he is so terribly bent on his woman-hating, I certainly hope he enjoys it.”

CHAPTER XV

AN UNCHARTED SNAG

ITH Captain Tuttle safely sequestered on board the Belle of the South, immune from feminine interference, we were ready for business. Addicks scattered the word that the H. T. P. Company was in the open market for fruit.

The surrounding country responded with alacrity to a bountifulness that surpassed all expectations.

They made a clean-up. By bullock-carts and pack-donkeys, a motley horde brought the luscious green banan', the juicy unripe orange, the fig, the coconut, the date. Truly there was endless variety; yam, paw-paw, chilli-pepper, and tapioca brought they them—and great was the stir and hubbub thereof.

Brigands from a distance of four or five miles, swarthy, stalwart, swaggering, and black-browed, dumped their offerings to the right, to the left—anywhere but the

right place — and joined in the general bedlam of jabber and gesticulation.

Addicks, Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Robison and I received and paid for the fruit at the wharf warehouse. Miss Vandiver and Aunt Bev were present, but not of any particular use; both were scared silly.

"I, myself, at times felt daunted when fifteen or twenty shouting, wild-eyed pig-Latins surrounded us, apparently clamoring for our blood. Addicks, however, sat imperturbable throughout the uproar.

"Ha-had n't we better call the military or the *policeos*?" I asked, during one particularly hair-raising demonstration, as a snarling rioter in a red sash menaced me with both hands upraised and screamed some awful denunciation.

"That fellow says he'll take five pesos for his whole load," Addicks explained patiently. "Give him his credit slip."

All altercations and disagreements being settled without the actual shedding of blood, the mob dispersed and the dove of peace came forth from its barricaded cote, whence it had taken refuge, chirruping happily once more.

The H. T. P. Company — or the minority

stockholders in charge—then did a little lightning calculating, took off a trial balance-sheet, using New Orleans market quo-



“That fellow says he’ll take five pesos for his whole load.”

tations of two days previous, plus freight and switching charges, re-ice at Atlanta and Richmond, and notify promptly by wire—er, yes—and found that they had cleared the snug figure of \$14,000 or some such sum.

Everybody felicitated everybody, and Mrs. Brown dictated a long letter to Captain Tuttle instructing him to apprise all and various freight-steamers he might meet going or coming that the company was prepared to charter, barter, or purchase for cash to carry tropical products from hither to thence.

But let us get back to the brick-yard. The railroad poked its nose five miles farther, meanwhile, and Honk's well-baked face, fused by the heat, had welded itself permanently into a large, mahogany-colored smile. He strongly indorsed the fruit-shipping venture, and said that, for amateurs, we had made a splendid beginning.

He went so far as to predict an immediate commercial success of such extravagant proportions that I found myself actually feeling sorry for the steel and oil magnates with their comparatively picayune enterprises.

The Belle of the South steamed away with the stars and stripes at the bat and

Captain Edgebert Tuttle on deck, and Santa Maria once more wrapped the drapery of its couch about herself and lay down to pleasant dreams.

At exactly three o'clock and thirty-three and one-third minutes, post meridian, a shadow passed between me and the sun. It was a pigeon. Addicks brought the message along presently.

"Los Cocos quite lively," wrote Cushing. "Citizens waking up. Saw two men on the street within last hour. About to obtain important option on rubber-tree tract. Details later."

Time and tide keep moving. Hasten, fellow sluggards, lest we get lost in the shuffle! Skip a week—two weeks! Ah, thanks, old Scythe-bearer!

Came a dulcet evening when but a scant three or four miles intervened twixt Honk's track-layers and Los Cocos. Save that insignificant gap—a mere step, as it were—the task was finished.

Forty-odd miles of steel highway stretched like a gray ribbon of sun-baked earth through jungle and field; a strip of alien soil a stone's throw in width, at whose edges the quick-sprouting vegetation stopped non-

plused. A few crawling creepers ventured out, but soon grew discouraged.

The jungle respected Honk's edict: "Thus far shall you come, but no farther!"

Already, along the line, budding stations of grass and 'dobe huts were springing into being overnight, like fungi. Prospects were good for a rousing local passenger business when the line should be formally opened for traffic.

Honk and I sat desultorily discussing these things over our post-prandial pipes. As the logical sequence of a pipe is smoke, I presently marked in the northeast a dense smudge of the same. It looked like the Caribbean Sea was on fire. I made some sort of an illuminated remark to that effect.

"Ships," quoth Honk laconically. "Must be a whole fleet. Maybe the Atlantic squadron is down here browsing around."

If such was the case, it soon became evident that they were about to pay us a visit. A numerous covey of vessels rose out of the deep and headed lickety-cut for the Bay of Bonagua.

I counted twelve—lost count—recounted, and made it fourteen. Honk tried it, and announced a total of seventeen

schooners, one sloop, and a four-masted tug—but I think he got excited.

By actual enumeration, the armada comprised ten in all, flying half a dozen different flags.

The Belle of the South was among them. It turned out that she was leading the outfit. Captain Tuttle had ransacked the seas for fruiterers and his drag-net had made a variegated haul.

A little of unnecessary red tape was involved in getting down to plain business with Captain Tuttle. He first sent Esteban as envoy non-potentiary bearing a note addressed to "any authorized male representative of the H. T. P. Company."

Esteban couldn't read 'ritin', so he gave the note to me. It stated that one Edgebert Tuttle, in command of the ship Belle of the South, would be pleased to arrange for a meeting, either on shore or on board his ship, for the transaction of all matters of a business nature—the discussion of future plans, etc.—and that no women of whatsoever description were to be present.

We sent a reply couched in the formal phraseology of courts—legal and liege—expressing our abject contrition for being

alive, how overwhelmed we were at the implied honor conferred upon us, and hoped he would feel free to suit his own convenience in regard to the proposed conference.

That made him sore. He disembarked in the middle of the night with his tin box under his arm and insisted on rendering his reports before morning.

An all-night session resulted. Honk said, however, that it was in line with everything else connected with the company. He said the whole project was irregular, if not actually illegal, but he wound up with a poetic allusion in which the words "dog eat dog" were used as a foundation for philosophical purposes.

After matters pertaining to the initial voyage had been adjusted, there ensued a couple of days' haggling through go-betweens, between Mrs. Brown and company and sundry and various skippers of tramp freighters.

Contracts were ultimately signed with all of 'em, and then the company got busy trying to find cargoes for the eleven stout ships. I forgot to mention that one slow-goer arrived after the official count was announced.

Cargoes for eleven ships.

What say we make this phase of the nar-

rative more vividly interesting by doing a running broad jump over the details of this monumental task?

While in the air, I'll take occasion to say that we enjoyed a week or ten days of near-carnival excitement and that we bought and loaded some fruit, if anybody asks you. But we accomplished it—assisted by the entire population of that section of Central America, 'tis true, likewise the railroad which helped a lot.

We stood a bit tousled, mayhap, and fruit-stained, but very hopeful, at the water's edge, on a scintillant summer's morning, watching our fleet of goodly ships sail away.

The first trip of the *Belle of the South* had netted Mrs. Brown and her associate venturers a neat, five-figured sum—\$12,000 or \$21,000, if I remember correctly. And eleven times \$12,000 or \$21,000, as the case may be, is something to contemplate on a scintillant summer's morning at the edge of the slobbering sea.

While in the throes of this sublime ecstasy, so to speak, how natural it is that the ridiculous must needs obtrude itself upon us. I saw a stodgy figure on the deck of a receding ship—I think it was the *Bouncing Betty*—and I started in surprise.

For, as one pea is like unto another, the figure was a living presentment of the recreant and all but forgotten Captain Toomey. The same square-cornered, bull-terrier pose, the round body, short neck, grape-shot head, surmounted by a faded blue, bent-vizored cap—I stared, open-mouthed, much after the manner of one who sees a long-lost ghost.

The figure stood glowering, then raised an arm and shook what looked like a clenched fist at the poetic scene it was leaving.

I clutched the arm of Addicks with one hand and the shoulder of Honk with the other.

“Look, quick!” I exclaimed. “On the deck of the next to last boat! See the man that looks like Napoleon taking his last rubber at France! A toothpick to a ten-dollar bill that that’s our old friend, Toomey!”

“Impossible!” said Honk.

“At all events, unusual,” agreed Addicks.

“Just the same, if that isn’t Toomey, I’ll eat my hat!” I insisted. “But to make sure, I’ll run to the *cuartel* and find out to an absolute certainty.”

I didn’t run the entire distance—it was too far, and the weather was too ardent for

marathoning—nevertheless, I made good time on the trip.

Once there, I awoke the solitary guard in charge and we conversed. Quite a while afterward we arrived at some sort of a misunderstanding to the effect that I desired greatly to look upon the one large-girthed prisonero of a “muchness the to swear and also the to eat—eat! Ah, *sacramento! Señor! Yes!*”

Whereupon we entered the kennels. We traversed a runway or corridor. My conductor continued to talk, and did not hurry. The cubby-hole allotted to the hungry and profane *Americano capitan* was in the far end.

We reached it in time, but, unfortunately, too late. The captain wasn't in; but there was a hole, opening, or aperture in the rear wall, of a size sufficient to admit the passage of a person of Captain Toomey's portliness.

The guard seized upon this clue almost instantly. He rolled his eyes and spoke rapidly.

“*Hola! Dios! Is it possible the pig has rooted his way out? Animo! Quedito! Ohe! Help! Help!*”

I coincided with his views politely and

bowed myself out. The place had an odor, anyhow. Outside, I bethought me of the captain's threatened cablegram. It was but a step to the telegrafos-office. I harked thither.

For two dollars and fifty cents the *clerkeos* assured me that Captain Toomey had, indeed, despatched a message several hours before. For five dollars I would be allowed to read the same with my own eyes. Yes. But the two fifty was all I had with me, so I took the fellow's word for the rest.

Addicks viewed the matter more lightly than I had persuaded myself to expect. He even indulged in a ripple of amusement.

"There's no cause for general alarm," said he. "We're pretty well entrenched in our position. Why need we try to evade the issue? Let Stringfellow and his friends come—when they choose. As for the belligerent Toomey—I had already arranged with Ramonez to set him at liberty this evening. He might have saved his finger-nails if—excuse me, I think Miss Vandiver is calling."

Honk went back jauntily to his last league of sunburning. And I—well, I took my regular afternoon off. I reflected with mo-

mentary regret that I might have been two dollars and a half better off financially if I had been a little less pertinacious that morning, still — the future looked roseate enough for all practical purposes.

The day the railroad was completed we all felt a wee mite elated. Even Mrs. Robinson muttered a semimelancholy burst of exuberance for the occasion, though habitually conservative.

And all along the line, from Santa Maria to Los Cocos, we instigated vivas and flag-waving and wholesale rejoicing. These things help.

Any small outlay of expense in such cases may be freely charged to advertising, for results will justify the same without exception. Therefore, we relaxed as mentioned, ran an excursion train festooned with orange-blossoms and Easter lilies, and carried everybody, clothed or unclothed, free of charge.

Lemonade flowed and the population sang songs and whooped it up all day. It was a festal occasion — a gala day.

That evening we had social inveiglements, and a far-famed spread in the bungalow. All the state and municipal dignitaries were

present with their *señoras* and *señoritas*.

The lord-mayor, the dog-catcher, and the minister of interstate commerce were in uniform. Cushing came over with all the *haciendados* and *dadesses* of Los Cocos, including *La Señorita* Zuela Carrenas, who was reputed to be wealthy beyond dreams of artifice and twice as beautiful as that, besides being young in her own right.

I noticed that Cushing kept one eye on her during the evening; nevertheless, Addicks was insanely jealous because Miss Vandiver danced with him twice. Honk led a cotillion, or minuet, or something with Mrs. Brown, and I sat out three or four vanilla ices with Aunt Beverly-Travis.

At midnight the joyous throng had just begun to feel thoroughly at home; at two the revelry was at its height; at four o'clock toasts were drunk standing, so you see —

But fifteen minutes later the smiling and suave *Señor* Don José de Passementerie, or whatever his name was, Minister of Highways and Byways of the Republic, rattled his medals and insignia, tapped his chest, bowed, smiled, and by means of other delightful mannerisms signified that he'd been holding back a pleasant surprise for us, but

that the moment was then sufficiently mel-low, etc., etc.

Principals and auxiliaries representing the H. T. P. Company there assembled kotowed and accorded the distinguished gentleman the most courteous and polite attention.

He spoke in a garbled way of the rich and powerful company, of its marvelous, stupendous, and supereminent success, of his country — her generosity, her patriotism; of himself — a particularly warm number; and then he unrolled a large, crackly foolscap scroll bearing the great red-ribboned seal of state and read a string of extravagant Spanish verbiage in fitting climax to his impassioned and unintelligible eloquence.

Mrs. Brown tittered her appreciation of the tribute.

The other ladies fluttered their fans and tried to look demure. Honk and I bowed and smirked. Personally, I hadn't made head or tail of any of it, but I felt sure it was nothing else than a proffer of the keys to the city — possibly the entire country.

But Addicks stood in somber silence, a black frown on his noble brow. When the pause threatened to become a rest, he spoke.

"Allow me to translate the dope-sheet,

señor," he said. "There are those who do not understand —"

'Twas well. Don José curled his mustachios with a flourish.

Addicks took the paper. When converted into the parlance of the anointed it certainly did read something fierce, being no more or less than a polite stickup.

The Honduras Tropical Products Company, being seized of certain valuable franchises and perquisites, was duly notified that, in the course of human events, it had been deemed necessary to levy a most gracious, specific, and properly authorized tax in the nature of a pecuniary occupation license, or something, amounting in round numbers to thirty-five thousand seven hundred sixty-nine dollars and fifty-four cents, same to be paid within ten days in United States money.

Yes. *Carrambos!*

"I want to know!" said Mrs. Brown.

CHAPTER XVI

'NEATH THE CEIBA-TREES



HAT I want to know," demanded Honk in clarion tones, "is the alternative if we refuse to be blackmailed in this way by these pirates?"

The minister of mud-holes grimaced and flicked his epaulets.

"Ah, the droll — the amusing *Señor Simpson*," he said with a flash of gold-embossed teeth. "The alternative — yes? I am instructed to say only so much. Eef the tax be not paid in *diez dias* — no? Then will my country of the sureness be compel to confesstate! All shall we take of the propertees. The railway! Yes. The houses — *las casas*? Yes. The lands? The load-wharfs? Yes. The sheeps —"

"Sheeps!" snapped Mrs. Brown. "The man's crazy! We have no live stock."

"Ships," explained Addicks. "Don José uses the plural for oratorical effect, seeing that we have but one ship and it is no great

shakes. Still, my friends," in a less flippant tone, "there's no getting around the bald truth in a good part of his statements. It is a time-honored custom among these third-rate countries to levy tribute from whom they can. It is their goose with the golden egg; I've been expecting it all along.

"I hardly thought they'd put the screws quite so forcibly, to start on; thirty-six thousand is rather ambitious. Somebody's been doing a little appraising. The fruit companies are always held up for a slice of easy money in this way. Unless" — he bowed to the smiling *señor* — "the fruit companies readjust the government!"

Don José ceased to smile.

"But the contribution — she will be pay!" said he.

"We shan't pay it!" declared Mrs. Brown. "We do not intend to be buncoed out of money right and left at the beck and call of these heathen!"

"That we do not!" corroborated Mrs. Smith.

"Oh, dear!" murmured Miss Vandiver. Addicks stiffened instantly.

"At least we have ten days of grace," he remarked. "There is no cause for immediate

anxiety. Much may happen in ten days. My good friend, Don José, there is a most magnificent moonlight view from the esplanade. Shall we smoke a cigar there, while we stroll?"

"With a supremeness of to be happy," acquiesced the dignitary genially.

The celebration adjourned soon afterward. I thought it had been unduly prolonged, anyway, so far as I was concerned. Early to bed (meaning 4 A. M.) and early to rise, makes a man baggy under the eyes!

Cushing decided, under protest, to remain in Santa Maria for a day or two, so it devolved on him to escort the ladies to the Imogen. I noticed that he tore himself away from the Los Cocos delegation only when McMuir had the special train well under way.

Honk sat with his head between his forepaws, immersed in profound meditation for a long time after the last shout of revelry died away in the distance.

"Do you know," he blurted presently, "I've got a clairvoyant hunch that there's something irregular about this tax business.

"Impossible!" I retorted. "Whoever heard of such a thing in this country?"

"What assurance have we," he continued, "that this isn't a scheme between Addicks and the Don Josiah Passepartout to cop out a little easy money? Couldn't they divvy up and nobody be the wiser? Sure, they could. Furthermore —"

"But Addicks is head over heels in love with Miss Vandiver," I argued.

"Maybe he is, and maybe he isn't. He's a sly dog, you'll admit. Maybe he needs the money to marry on —"

"I won't believe he's crooked," I said firmly. "I won't entertain it. Wait till you hear the returns from the esplanade. Perhaps you'll change your mind."

Honk can be rather obstinate when he thinks he has one of his clairvoyant hunches, as he calls them. He waggled his head pessimistically. I went to bed.

Addicks, I'll have to confess, was somewhat vague in his replies to questions on the morrow. He observed mildly that he saw no reason for anxiety or alarm just then.

He said that Don Quixote had been altogether too high-priced to start out with, but that there might be a slump in the market later. Also, that there was a remote possi-

bility, of course, that the company ultimately might be forced to come through to save their bacon.

I had to admit that, for a diplomatic representative who was supposed to have the interests of his constituents at heart, he seemed unconcerned—even though his clients were about to be strong-armed out of a considerable sum of cash money. Honk was more suspicious than before.

Mrs. Brown and company came on the scene before we had finished shaving and garbing ourselves properly for public appearance.

"Well," said Mrs. Brown, in the manner of a Supreme Court handing down an important decision, "we have threshed it all out. Archie gave us the idea. He has such a mind for legal matters. We have planned our course thoroughly. Archie says this tax has been levied according to law.

"If it isn't paid, the usual procedure is for the government to sell the property of the delinquent for the debt. Whoever buys it in is granted a tax-title which stands good in law. Archie has gone to the mayor or the United States consul or somewhere, to confirm this.

"If it's all straight, we will allow the government to sell the goods and chattels of the old company, according to law. Then, as a new company, we shall bid in the property, pay the money, and take over the title. The original stockholders will then be entirely out of the enterprise; they'll have nothing more to say. It is a splendid idea! Archie thought of it."

"But —" interposed Addicks.

"Now don't tell us it isn't feasible, or I shan't like you," said Miss Vandiver.

"I was about to say," he continued mildly, "that the former management would be allowed by law to redeem the concession within a stated time."

"By paying the amount of the tax levied with an additional penalty, yes!" said Mrs. Brown. "But we'll be able to delay settlement for no telling how long, by fighting it through the courts. In the meantime we shall run the business and pocket the proceeds."

Addicks bowed low.

"As a mere tyro in such things," he murmured, "I beg to bend the knee in homage to you ladies."

Cushing came in during these amenities.

He reported, hurriedly, that everything was propitious; the method of procedure was exactly as they'd counted on, and the coup would be easy—even simpler than looting a baby's bank. He then excused himself, saying that an important option or something made it imperative that he should catch the eleven o'clock train for Los Cocos.

Miss Vandiver, for no apparent reason, smiled engagingly at Addicks.

I wonder if by any hook or crook I could squeeze through a love scene in the next ten or fifteen minutes. I've a hundred other things of far greater importance—well, here goes!

First, the setting. A nook 'neath the ceiba-trees. For background, the tropic green of leaf and shoot mingled with the paler tints of feathery fronds and the yellow and white of bursting blossoms. Here and there, like a savage's headdress of clustered plumes, clumps of coconut palms.

For foreground, the molten mirror of the shimmering sea. Above, the limpid azure of the sky. Around, the golden sunshine, the twitter of birds, the hummings and rustlings and whisperings of life in its myriad forms, seen and unseen. Be that as it may—

Addicks and Miss Vandiver started for a stroll to see a red-headed green paroquet's nest. Having a moment's leisure, I watched them with a fatherly interest from the bungalow window. In spite of Honk's morbid suspicions, I remained loyal to Addicks.

If he loved Fanny Vandiver, I gave him my hearty mental and moral support. I boosted for him telepathically. Being thus in on the deal, so to speak, I had a desire to see the outcome, so I got out Honk's binoculars and stood at the window.

They strolled. He plucked for her a posy. They looked at each other and at the sighing sea. Addicks seemed to be talking. She pointed with gloved finger at something — a bird, a tree — but Addicks continued to seem to be talking.

She allowed him to carry the parasol. They were a long way along the shore where the thin white line of surf feathered and broke on the sands. And, finally, they came to a nook 'neath the ceiba-trees — we've already had that — the setting.

So they sat on a great boulder. And Addicks took her hand . . . he talked some more . . . she listened with face averted . . . but he seemed determined

to say his say . . . she looked up, demurely, and suddenly swayed . . . but she didn't fall—far . . . (Don't leave out the dots, Mr. Printer!) . . . and his arm stole . . . but the parasol intervened! Bother!

They returned, a little late for luncheon, both radiantly radiant. Aunt Beverly-Travis pretended to chide. Who, pray, was Aunt Beverly-Travis to intrude her idle chatter upon the sublime somnambulism of love's young dream? Poof, forsooth!

—“What do you say, now?” I asked when I had recounted the incident to Honk. “Hardly likely that Addicks would double-cross his affianced wife for the sake of a petty graft, is it?”

“Maybe he would and maybe he wouldn't,” Honk grunted evasively. “He's a penniless adventurer, ain't he? Looks to me like a case of everything to gain and nothing to lose. He's a good fellow all right. Likable and agreeable and all that. And so far as I'm concerned, I only hope he don't burn his fingers in some kind of an intrigue before he's through. Humph!”

CHAPTER XVII

WHAT CAME OUT IN THE WASH



ONE but a foolish pool-player would essay to pocket all the balls at a single cue-thrust. Likewise he is a thoughtless merchant who allows all his bills to come due on the same day.

Tragic, then, shall be the fate of the careless artificer in words who weaves half a score of promising plots helter-skelter, and ultimately is confronted by the nerve-racking task of gathering in the flying threads at one swoop. Woe, woe, indeed! For many and merciless shall be the critics that camp on the bungler's trail!

In the teeth of all this, I shall yet continue. I am of a rash and foolhardy race; a people that cares naught for consequences and very little for expenses; a people that goes in for lemons if they come out squeezed.

So I shall grab in the loose ends of this narrative with one lightning swipe; and clip,

bind, and tie the climaxes neatly in a bundle, like stogies, submitting them with a single twist of the wrist.

And, as the ponies come bunched in the final dash down the stretch, to flit under the wire in solid phalanx, so shall the action close. If I shouldn't see you at the finish, I take this occasion to say good-bye. And good luck, old pals!

All right, let's go!

Mrs. Brown and her devoted coterie awaited with scant patience the day set for the projected confiscation, sale, purchase, and reorganization of the H. T. P. Company's possession.

We toilers in the bungalow office paid little attention to the details, being occupied with a rush of passenger and freight traffic on the railroad.

We supposed it was all cut and dried. Addicks spent most of his waking hours in the company of Miss Vandiver, which made news scarce.

The night before the big day, Tuttle returned with his flotilla.

Day dawned on a busy scene. A bay full of ships, a town full of sailors. The clank and clatter of a dozen vessels in a roadstead

is considerable even though every soul on board be ashore. On the streets bare-legged natives stared wonderingly at noisy groups of sailors.

A bit before noon there came a heavy tramping on the stairs. The door opened. Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Smith, and Mrs. Robinson entered. They seemed perturbed.

"We have just come from the what-you-may-call-it of the government," vouchsafed Mrs. Brown. "We took the United States consul with us. The *secretario* of the foreign affairs department of this one-horse country, as I think he called himself, and several other mulatto gentlemen were present.

"We informed them, through the consul, that we had come to attend the sale of the H. T. P. Company's property, according to law. They chattered among themselves and looked in a lot of books. Each appeared to be a bigger fool than the next one. We were informed that there was no tax on record against us."

"But Don Josephus lives at the capital, you know," said Honk. "It may be that you went to the wrong place. Perhaps you should telegraph —"

"No. We went to the right place. They admitted that there had been such a tax levied, but said that it had been canceled. Further than that, they either couldn't or wouldn't say. It is a mysterious business. We've been virtually swindled out of the property."

"I'll venture that Addicks—" began Honk.

"Pardon me," said I, from the window overlooking the harbor. "A long, low, slate-colored vessel that looks like a steam-yacht just warped up against the wharf a few minutes ago. Could it be anybody we're not expecting? I also notice Addicks and Captain Tuttle coming this way across the plaza. You ladies were supposed not to meet Captain Tuttle, I believe."

"Botheration!" said Mrs. Brown. "We can't be eternally running from that man. Come, girls. We will go into the next room and close the door. And remember!" she wagged a warning finger, "we shall be listening. Govern yourselves accordingly!"

Captain Tuttle bore under his arm the inevitable tin box.

Addicks appeared to be in a remarkable state of mental exaltation from some cause

or other, evinced by his flushed face and sparkling eyes. Something had happened that was entirely to his liking, doubtless. I glanced out the window from force of habit.

"Aha!" I sung out. "Also *hola!* and *ohé!* Four men approaching off the port bow to board us! Shall we lower the portcullis, Lord Belwether?"

Honk reconnoitered.

"Stringfellow and his gang, by cricky!" he exclaimed. "Now for the explosion!"

Addicks grinned in an altogether fatuous and dreamy fashion.

"Ahem!" coughed Tuttle. "P'raps I'd better withdraw for the present. I'll step into the next room."

He opened the partition door, walked in, and—without waiting to turn around, backed right out again.

If I'm any judge of physiognomical phenomena, I'd say that his face depicted horror, superstition, disgust, relief, and a kind of grim, saturnine satisfaction. By that time there was heard the tread of marching feet on the stairs. Escape was cut off. Captain Tuttle folded his arms over his tin box and waited.

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Stringfellow, sleek and self-possessed;
Latham, blond and beaming; Cabell—
Kingsland, no less well-groomed and
gracious, entered jauntily.



*“And—without waiting to turn around, backed right
out again.”*

Ah, thought I, the same suave, smiling
scoundrels who had laughed at Honk and
me! It was our turn. I rubbed my hands
in anticipation.

"Ah, gentlemen," murmured Stringfellow, nodding to all and blinking at us with his yellow cat's eyes. "How goes the game? Business seems rushing, from indications outside. Ships in the harbor—hurry and bustle in the town. Addicks, you're looking well—"

"Can't complain," said Addicks serenely. "I s'pose you all are here as a result of Toomey's cable?"

"Um! No—we received no cable. We came, in fact—but what's up? Anybody making trouble? By the way, how about the minority people? I presume they're all safely tamed and ready to eat out of the hand, ere this—"

The inner room door creaked slightly as it swung back. In the opening the flushed and angry face of Mrs. Brown shone like a harvest moon. Stringfellow shrank back, with a look of horrified surprise, instantly replaced by one of anxious inquiry, and—oh, half a dozen other mixed expressions. I made ready to laugh, but didn't.

"Marian!" he cried. "You here? What does this mean?"

Mrs. Bro—Stringfellow came forth trumpeting. "What does it mean, is it? It

means considerable, Jotham Stringfellow! We're the minority people, are we? Safely tamed to eat out of the hand, eh?"

The other ladies came from behind and stood scowling defiance. It was Latham's and Cabell's turn to do some exclaiming.

"Elinor!" from Latham.

"Clarissa!" from Cabell.

"You the minority stockholders—" stammered Stringfellow—"I—I can't understand. Er—ah—Cushing represented to us that a syndicate purchased the shares."

"We were the syndicate, sir. We bought the stock to help Archie get started in his broker business. He has repaid us by coming down here and falling in love with one of these mulatto girls, too, the ingrate! But that has nothing to do with your villainous schemes to rob us of our money—"

"Tut, tut! Marian, haven't I warned you many times about dabbling into things that you know nothing about? I've no doubt you led the others into it. Now, you—"

"Now I what?" thundered his wife. "You unscrupulous wretch! Don't dare to criticize me! You and your thieving company—with your robbing and plundering of helpless women and orphans! How dare you?"

Oh, I shall lay hands on you in another minute!"

My attention was diverted to Captain Tuttle. He placed his tin box unostentatiously on Honk's desk. His honest face was lighted by a smile of surpassing effulgence. Exquisite enjoyment of a long-deferred revenge transfigured him. The fact that his enemies were married to each other seemed to strike him all at once as being sufficient punishment. He stepped softly from the room.

"That was Edgebert Tuttle," said Mrs. Stringfellow. "He is an honest man. I might have married him one day, if I had been gifted with the sense of a goose; but I chose a captain of finance instead. Humph!"

"Well, how much are you out, Marian?" asked Jotham P. meekly. "Maybe we can save something from the wreck."

"Out? We're not out anything. We've made money! Lots of it! Thousands and thousands of dollars! Out? I want to know! Thanks to Mr. Simpson and Mr. Addicks and Mr.—well, a number of others."

"Then what's the controversy about?"

Another interruption. Yes. It was our busy day at the bungalow.

Enter Aunt Beverly-Travis accompanied by—our leading juvenile. They were a little tardy.

"Oh, dear! May we come in?" asked Miss Vandiver prettily.

Kingsland, beaming with recognition, sprang forward with marked haste.

"Why, who would have dreamed of seeing you here?" he effused. "How nice! Fanny Vandiver, of all people!"

But Aunt Beverly-Travis obtruded herself adroitly and received the brunt of the attack.

"Oh, no, you don't, Edwin Kingsland!" she laughed merrily. "You may flirt with me if you like, but this isn't Fanny Vandiver any longer. This is Mrs. Lon J. Addicks, if you please, since nearly two hours ago."

Addicks arose with alacrity and ranged himself on the near side of his young and blushing wife. There ensued quite a flutter of excitement. Kingsland was a good sport withal, and was the first to extend the glad hand of indorsement and felicitation. Others crowded up in turn. Mrs. Stringfellow, however, seemed most put out.

"Gracious me, Fanny," she said, pointedly. "I should have known about this! I fear you have thrown yourself away on a penniless adventurer. The man has married you for your money."

Stringfellow and his three coadjutants pricked up their ears at that. And then a sudden sunburst of illuminated comprehension seemed to dawn on their benighted understandings, as it were. They nudged, ogled, and slapped each other in an ecstasy of pleased enjoyment; which demonstration finally culminated in loud roars of laughter. Whatever it was, there was no getting around the fact that it was a good joke. Addicks looked sheepish. He gulped, and opened his mouth—but no words issued therefrom.

"Let me tell it, Lon J.," said Stringfellow, regaining his gravity by an effort. "I would like to insert one small bug in my wife's ear, anyway." He addressed himself to that lady, with some severity. "Marian, it appears that you are badly tangled in your premises. You always were good at jumping at conclusions, but in this instance you've surpassed yourself. I must congratulate you upon the stupendous lack of



“Whatever it was, there was no getting around the fact that it was a good joke.”

actual information regarding the Honduras Tropical Products Company you at present possess.

"The original company has long since disposed of its interest in the property here. Ha! You didn't know that, did you? The fact is, we saw soon after we had launched our project the immense difficulties that confronted us in the attempt to construct a railroad in this country. You people doubtless know what these difficulties are, by this time, so I'll not enumerate them. At any rate, we decided to unload. True, we made a bluff at developing the property, but it was merely a bluff. We were quite well aware that the thing wasn't to be considered seriously.

"About this time we placed an offering of stock on the market; we expected the same to reimburse us for our time and trouble. And it seems that you ladies were—ah—indiscreet enough to purchase the same. If you had consulted us, as you ought, we might have—but no matter, you didn't do it. You bought the entire offering. Soon afterward we made a job-lot price on the rest of our interest in the enterprise. Not only that, but we found a purchaser. He

knew just what he was buying, however, so the gold-brick methods at which we are presumably so adept—thank you!—were not employed. This person paid us the cash in hand, and the deal was closed. If there has since been sharp practices—the robbing of women and—er—orphans—you will have to shoulder the blame on the gentleman in question. He is present. His name—is Lon J. Addicks.”

Stringfellow was a skilled raconteur; he knew the proper place for the pause. And then he continued:

“Unless he has since disposed of it, Mr. Addicks owns the controlling interest in a million-dollar corporation, that according to your own statements is well-established, and on a paying basis. I may be permitted to add that he bought it for a song.”

Addicks cleared his throat.

“There are,” he drawled, “others whom I might mention that deserve the credit if the venture has turned out to be a money-maker. For example: Mrs. Bro—that is, Mrs. Stringfellow, and—well, all of you-all. And then there is Honk—pardon me!—Mr. Simpson, and Horace. They alone made it possible to build the railroad, upon which so much depended—”

Honk waved a deprecatory hand, and would have spoken. Mrs. Cabell beat him to it. Mrs. Cabell, who was habitually taciturn.

"What puzzles me," she said, "is the mysterious disappearance of that tax the government assessed against us. Who paid it? Somebody tell me that."

"H'm—yes," mused Addicks, retrospectively. "I believe there was something of the kind. You see it would have been all right for you ladies to have carried out your plan of buying in the concessions, and reorganizing the company—that is, it would have been all right for—er—Mrs. Addicks; but where would I have been? So I had to pay it, or—well, arrange the matter, you know, in order to protect myself."

"I want to—ahem!" boomed Mrs. Stringfellow. "You did right. Let us go to luncheon."

